

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

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Volume 2, No. 267 © SS 2004 MIDEAST EDITION

TUESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2005

Former presidents head U.S. aid effort

Elder Bush, Clinton tapped; Navy ups relief for tsunami victims

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AP photos

Left: U.S. Navy helicopter crewmen from the USS Abraham Lincoln try to restrain survivors as they struggle to distribute food and water. The mission on Monday was to an isolated village south of Banda Aceh in northwest Indonesia. Above: A Navy flight crewman carries a young injured evacuee at the airport in Banda Aceh. As it raised its death toll from last week's earthquake and tsunami to almost 100,000, Indonesia said it plans to team with its neighbors to establish an early warning system for disasters.

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News Tracker ... What's new with old news

World

Iraq's neighbors meeting: Iran believes there is no reason for a meeting of Iraq's neighbors planned later this week in Amman, Tehran's ambassador to Jordan said Monday in a further indication of a strain in relations following accusations by Jordan's King Abdullah II that Iran was seeking to influence the upcoming Iraqi elections.

A day earlier, Tehran said Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi would not attend Thursday's meeting.

Iran will be represented by one of its deputy foreign ministers, Golam Ali Khorsro, Jordanian Foreign Ministry spokesman Raja Sukiyaki told the official Jordanian news agency Pert on Monday.

Jordan has invited the foreign ministers of Iraq's other neighbors — Iran, Turkey, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Syria — and representatives from Iraq, Egypt and Bahrain to the meeting.

The U.N. special representative for Iraq, Ashraf Qazi, also will attend the meeting, Foreign Ministry spokesman Sukayri told Petra.

Italy mob war: Two men were gunned down in Naples over the weekend, raising fears that the deadly mob war that has plagued the southern Italian city will continue into the new year.

A third man died from injuries sustained during a mob shooting days earlier, authorities said.

More than 130 people were killed in the Naples region last year, most of them in mob violence.

Investigators say the violence stems from conflict within the Camorra's Di Lauro clan, which has splintered and is locked in a turf war over the control of drug trafficking.

Afghan-Pakistan border clash: Afghanistan ordered extra troops to its border with Pakistan after an exchange of artillery and mortar fire with Pakistani troops on the other side, an Afghan general said Monday.

Gen. Khial Baz, commander of a militia division in the eastern province of Khost, said he had reports of Pakistani troops moving toward the mountainous frontier, and that he had ordered his men to also reinforce Afghan border posts.

He wouldn't say how many Afghan troops were being mobilized or when they would leave their barracks.

Baz said several artillery rounds whistled over the border into Khost's Gurbuz district on Monday morning. No casualties were reported.

Mideast peace efforts: Turkey is ready to use its close ties with both Israel and the Palestinians to help restart Mideast peace efforts, Turkey's foreign minister said in remarks published Monday, hours before he was due to leave for the region.

Abdullah Gul told Hurriyet newspaper in an interview that both sides have asked Turkey to play a role in relaunching peace moves that have foundered during more than four years of fighting.

The minister is to meet Israeli President Moshe Katsav, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom on Tuesday and the Palestinian leadership on Wednesday.

It's the most high-profile visit to the region by a Turkish official since a party with roots in Turkey's Islamic movement came to power in 2002.

Gunfire in northern Kosovo: Two parked



U.N. vehicles were damaged Monday after being hit by gunfire in northern Kosovo, police said. No one was injured.

Seven rounds hit the two vehicles, which were parked unattended at a police station, which was also hit, in the town of Zubin Potok, 38 miles northwest of the province's capital, Pristina, a police statement said.

An investigation has been launched.

Nation

Holiday travel nightmare: More than 100 US Airways executives and other employees volunteered to serve coffee and snacks, sort and move bags and help passengers find their way Sunday at Philadelphia International Airport to try to avoid a repeat of the bankrupt carrier's Christmas weekend debacle.

The airline reported no problems by late Sunday afternoon, when about half the day's expected 38,000 passengers had boarded their flights or claimed their bags. The volume was comparable with the Christmas and Thanksgiving travel peaks.

Around Christmas, hundreds of flights were canceled and thousands of bags piled up in what the airline's chief executive, Bruce Lakefield, called an "operational meltdown" that stranded holiday travelers and prompted a federal investigation. Airline management blamed the problems on unexpected numbers of flight attendants and baggage handlers calling in sick, while employees' unions blamed poor planning by management.

Algerian deported: A man who met with two Sept. 11 hijackers before they crashed an American Airlines jet into the Pentagon has been deported to Algeria, the Department of Homeland Security said Friday.

Samir Abdoun, 38, was arrested 11 days after the 2001 attacks and convicted of immigration and passport violations and Social Security fraud, officials said. He remained in U.S. custody until arrangements could be

Gaza withdrawal: An Israeli border policeman gives instructions as officers scuffle with Jewish settlers while dismantling an illegal structure at an outpost outside the Jewish settlement of Yitzhar, near the West Bank town of Nablis, on Monday. Some 100 settlers who came from other settlements confronted police and army trying to evacuate two caravans from the illegal outpost while Jewish settler leaders warned that hundreds, and possibly thousands, of soldiers could refuse to carry out orders to evict Gaza Strip settlers, a sign of the difficulties the army could face in carrying out the Gaza withdrawal planned by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

worked out with the Algerian government.

Armed federal agents escorted Abdoun onto a commercial flight Thursday in San Diego, he arrived Friday in Algeria, where authorities took him into custody, said Lauren Mack, a department spokeswoman.

Young mayor: One of the youngest mayors in the country has resigned three years into his four-year term to pursue opportunities outside the state.

Chris Portman, who was 19 when he took office in Mercer three years ago, announced his resignation in a letter dated Dec. 28. He said nothing further about why he was leaving.

Portman's election drew the national spotlight to Mercer, a borough of 2,400 people about 55 miles north of Pittsburgh. He met financier Donald Trump and President Bush, and was featured in Rolling Stone magazine and on MTV.

War on terrorism

Soldiers return: With family members cheering, more than 700 U.S. National Guard soldiers were welcomed home in an emotional ceremony after a 15-month tour of duty, including more than nine months on the ground in Iraq.

Dressed in desert fatigues, members of the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry of the New York Army National Guard marched into McGrath Grammarian at Fort Drum on Sunday night, and came to a halt.

The unit was the first New York Guard infantry organization ordered to federal active duty for war service since World War II, replacing mostly active duty combat units already in Iraq.

The battalion performed security, raids and other offensive operations, capturing numerous weapons caches. The soldiers also helped train Iraqi National Guard members and provided medical, logistical and civil support to Iraqi villages, schools, mosques and families.

Stories and photo from The Associated Press

Correction

A story in the Jan. 2 edition recounting the major events of 2004 erroneously reported the number of homes destroyed by hurricanes in Florida. The four major storms of 2004 destroyed 25,000 homes, not 2,500.

Comics, horoscopes, advice —
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1 die in 3 separate car bombings in Iraq

BY DUSAN STOJANOVIC
The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A roadside explosion and three separate car bombings — one near the prime minister's party headquarters in Baghdad — killed at least 16 people on Monday as insurgents pressed their deadly campaign to disrupt national elections which Iraq's defense minister said could be postponed.

A car bomb exploded late Monday at a U.S.-manned checkpoint to the Green Zone, the heavily fortified area that houses the U.S. Embassy and Iraqi government offices, U.S. Embassy spokesman Bob Callahan said. U.S. troops responded by burning a burning SUV at the scene.

Three bodies were seen burning inside the destroyed vehicle. The nationalities of the victims, identified as employees of the U.S.-based risk consulting group Kroll Inc., were not immediately known.

Iraqi police Lt. Khalid Mohammed said the bomb targeted a U.S. nonmilitary convoy and there were casualties at the checkpoint, which is the main Green Zone exit for trips to Baghdad International Airport west of the city. American contractors and diplomats commonly make the journey along the dangerous airport road in SUVs.

Meanwhile, Iraqi defense minister Sadr Hussein raised the possibility Monday that Iraqi elections could be postponed to try to persuade minority Sunni Muslims to participate in the vote.

The first strike, by an explosive-laden car near Interior Minister Ayad Allawi's party headquarters, killed two police officers and two civilians and injured 25 others. The radical Shiite leader was not inside the building in Baghdad's western district of Harethiya when the blast occurred, his aides said.

The second car bomb attack



Iraqi and American security forces inspect the site of an explosion at a checkpoint in western Baghdad on Monday. A suicide bomber blew up an explosives-laden car near the prime minister's party headquarters, killing two police officers and one civilian and injuring 25 other Iraqis as insurgents pressed their campaign to disrupt national elections.

took place in Balad, about 50 miles north of the capital, killing four Iraqi National Guard soldiers and wounding 14, U.S. military spokesman Neal E. O'Brien said. The driver of the car bomb died in the blast.

The third strike occurred in Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, killing at least six Guardsmen and injuring four others in a roadside explosion, police said.

"Anti-Iraq forces continue to target the Iraqi National Guard" because the ING is creating conditions for "successful elections," O'Brien said.

Car bombings and roadside ex-

plosions have become a standard feature of the deadly insurgency in Iraq ahead of the elections scheduled for Jan. 30. On Sunday, a car bombing also in Balad killed at least 22 national guardsmen and their bus driver. Ten other people were killed in separate attacks Sunday.

U.S. officials have warned of violence ahead of the landmark vote for a national assembly, and the guerrillas have made good on those fears with a tragic case.

Iraq's poorly equipped security forces usually have far less training than American troops, and attacks on them usually result in more casualties.

U.S. deaths in Iraq

The Associated Press

As of Sunday at least 1,329 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. At least 1,042 died as a result of hostile action, the Defense Department said. The figures include three military civilians.

The AP count is one higher than the Defense Department's tally, last updated at 10 a.m. Thursday.

The British military has reported 76 deaths; Italy, 19; Poland, 16; Spain, 11; Ukraine, nine; Bulgaria, seven; Slovakia, three; Estonia, Latvia and the

Netherlands, two each; and Denmark, El Salvador, Hungary and Latvia one death each.

Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, 1,191 U.S. military members have died, according to AP's count. That includes at least 933 deaths resulting from hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

The latest deaths reported by the military:

■ No deaths reported.

The latest identifications reported by the military:

■ No identifications reported.

Police said the first car exploded shortly before 10 a.m. Monday after trying to ram a police checkpoint outside the offices of Allawi's Iraqi National Accord party in a western Baghdad district.

The driver was killed in addition to the two policemen and civilian. Eighteen other officers were among the wounded as well as seven civilians. Witnesses said machine-gun fire broke out after the explosion, which set fire to three police vehicles.

The radical Ansar al-Sunnah Army claimed responsibility for the strike in Baghdad.

"One of Islam's lions managed to carry out a heroic martyrdom operation targeting a large bunch of Iraqi police agents responsible for guarding the headquarters of the National Council of the apostate Allawi," a statement posted on the group's Web site said.

An Iraqi policeman was killed and two others were wounded when a beheaded, body-trapped corpse exploded in the town of Mosul as Iraqi police officers se-

cured the site and attempted to search the remains in order to identify the body," a government statement said Monday. It was not clear when the incident happened. "This is another example of how the criminals and terrorists — attempting to thwart Iraq's efforts to conduct free and fair elections — have no regard for their fellow countrymen," the government said.

Meanwhile on Sunday, prominent Shiite leaders belonging to the Unified Iraqi Alliance — a mainstream Shiite coalition running in conduct free and fair elections — have no regard for their fellow countrymen," the government said.

Shiites, who make up 60 percent of Iraq's 26 million people, are eager for the vote to go ahead so they can take power long denied them when the Sunni Arab minority ousted the late Saddam Hussein. But they hope the Sunnis, who make up about 20 percent of the people, will participate lest the vote be considered illegitimate.

Arab paper reports mess hall bomber a Saudi

BY MAAMOUN YOUSSEF
The Associated Press

CAIRO, Egypt — The suicide bomber who killed 22 people when he blew himself up in a U.S. mess hall in Mosul, Iraq, was a Saudi military student, an Arab newspaper reported Monday.

Saudi-owned Asharq al-Awsat identified him as 20-year-old Ahmed Said Ahmed al-Ghamdi, citing unnamed friends of the man's father.

The friends said members of an Iraqi resistance group contacted al-Ghamdi's father to tell him his son was the suicide bomber who carried out the Jan. 21 attack, the deadliest on an American installation in Iraq.

The U.S.-led coalition that toppled Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein has faced fierce resistance, most of it carried out by Saddam loyalists or Iraqi nationalists. Some of the deadliest attacks have been blamed on foreign Muslim extremists.

U.S. officials have said their preliminary investigation indicates the bomber was dressed in an Iraqi military uniform but was not an Iraqi soldier — when he slipped into a mess tent packed with soldiers eating lunch in northern Iraq.

The father refused to discuss the suicide bombing, but he told the newspaper his son had gone to Iraq and had died there. The family held a mourning ceremony, the paper said. It did not say when the ceremony was held or where in Saudi Arabia the family lived.

The paper did not name the Iraqi resistance group. But Ansar al-Sunnah, a radical Islamic Iraqi group that has been active in northern Iraq, claimed responsibility for the mess hall attack. In a videotape posted on the Web, Ansar al-Sunnah identified the suicide bomber as Abu Omar al-Musali — an apparent nemesis of the guerrilla movement.

The man identified as Abu Omar al-Musali appeared in the Web video wearing an explosives-laden vest, but did not speak. Another man, speaking in an Iraqi accent, described how the operation had been planned. A subsequent segment showed what appeared to have been the attack.

Ansar al-Sunnah shares the anti-Western, Quranic rhetoric of Islamic extremist groups like al-Qaida, but has confined its fight to Iraq and has not actively recruited foreign fighters. The group, though, has declared that it worked with an al-Qaida branch in Iraq on at least one operation, in November.

Asharq al-Awsat said al-Ghamdi started studying medicine in Sudan when his father worked and lived there. Al-Ghamdi stayed to complete his studies when his family returned to Saudi Arabia, the paper reported, without saying when the family left.

It said the father said he learned Dec. 16 that his son had withdrawn all the money left in a Sudanese bank account for him and later received a phone call from his son telling him that he was in Iraq to fight the Americans.

GI killed in firefight with Afghan insurgents

BY STEPHEN GRAHAM
The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — An American soldier was killed and three others wounded in a clash with militants in eastern Afghanistan early Monday, U.S. military said. It was the second American fatality in as many days.

Spokesman Maj. Mark McCann said the firefight occurred near Asadabad in Kunar province after two homemade bombs targeted coalition forces went off.

"Resulting from the engagement, one U.S. soldier was killed and three were wounded," he told a news conference.

Kunar is part of a swath of southern and eastern Afghanistan where insurgents continue to defy the 18,000-strong U.S.-led force still hunting remnants of the former Taliban regime and al-Qaida, three years after the Islamic hard-liners were ousted from power.

Col. Gary Cheek, the commander of U.S. forces in the eastern region, said he recently sent additional troops to the region to stop giving refuge to militants.

The mountainous area next to the Pakistani border is viewed as a stronghold of renegade Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former prime minister who has joined the Taliban in vowing to drive out foreign troops and topple the U.S.-backed government.

"I am confident they (residents) will deny the sanctuary to the insurgents and we will drive them from the Kunar area," Cheek told the news conference.

Monday's clash came a day after one U.S. soldier and a former Afghan militia leader were killed in a gunfight when American troops tried to search the man's home in western Herat province.

Iraqis top Americans in soccer match



SEAN KIMMONS/Courtesy of the U.S. Army

Mariwan Noory, center, an Iraqi police officer, squeezes between two unidentified Company B defenders during a soccer game at Bull Base in Kirkuk, Iraq, last month. The soldiers lost 2-1 to the police officers.

AAFES cuts off sales of bootleg DVDs and games

Soldiers at bases around Baghdad are complaining that one of their main sources of entertainment is being taken away.

The DVD stalls run by Iraqi vendors outside many post exchanges are being shut down because of security concerns stemming from last month's suicide bombing at a base near Mosul, Army and Air Force Exchange Service officials said.

Granted, the movies sold at the stalls are of dubious origin and probably don't adhere to international copyright laws. But at \$2 per movie, the prices can't be beat.

The small shops, often clustered around the AAFES stores on bases, also offer bootleg video games, Cuban cigars, cheap cigarettes and every kind of knife imaginable.

According to an AAFES spokesman in Dallas, the stalls "have been closed because of force-protection concerns that are keeping local nationals, particularly those not associated with current contractors or DOD agencies, off the installations."

Some of those stalls had been approved by base commanders or base mayor cells, but are now being shut down, AAFES spokesman Judd Anstey said in an e-mail response to Stars and Stripes.

As a result, several of the stores offered "going out of business" sales, resulting in a two-day windfall of even cheaper movies and games for soldiers.

What's in a name?

Many American last names refer back to the occupation of their ancestors, such as farmer, miller, baker or even smith, but one soldier assigned to

Company B, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment has one that's appropriate to his current job in Iraq.

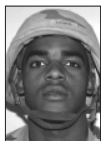
When Pvt. David Tanks joined the Army, he seemingly was destined to become a tanker.

"When I first got (to the recruiters' office), they said, 'Oh, you want to be a tanker,'" the 21-year-old Franklin County, Va.-native said.

But Tanks said his last name didn't influence his decision. When he went to the processing station, he was given a choice of career fields. "They gave me a list of jobs: infantry, artillery, scouts and tanks."

Tanks chose tanks. "It was my best option and the safest, so that was what I chose," he said.

During basic training his name was the first the drill sergeants remembered. "When they wanted something ... usually push-ups, guess who got called?" he said.



Tanks

Stars and Stripes reporters Jason Chudy and Joseph Giordano contributed to this report.

E-mail Chudy at: chudyj@mail.stripes.osd.mil; e-mail Giordano at: giordanoj@pst.stripes.osd.mil

Two N.H. newspapers honor servicemembers

Stars and Stripes

New Hampshire's two largest newspapers have announced that the state's Citizen of the Year award for 2004 is being given to its men and women in

the armed forces.

The new award, expected to be bestowed annually, is for the "thousands of New Hampshire's sons and daughters are serving in support of the War on Ter-

ror," the Union Leader and New Hampshire Sunday News told Stars and Stripes via e-mail.

More on the story can be found at: www.theunionleader.com in the papers' "War on Terror" section.

Commander: American forces in Afghanistan taking fewer prisoners

BY STEPHEN GRAHAM

The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The U.S. military is taking as few prisoners as possible in its campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan, an American commander said Monday, partly to forestall more complaints about its conduct after the deaths in custody of at least eight prisoners.

Col. Gary Cheek, the U.S. commander for eastern Afghanistan, said the troops under his command would be "reluctant" in their pursuit of insurgents, including some 20 unidentified top leaders, through the bitter Afghan winter.

But he said the soldiers were taking as few prisoners as possible as they try to win stronger support from the local population, and following a review of the military's policy on detentions last year.

"We are always adapting to the changes in the environment and our commanders, our soldiers, are also trying to be more sensitive to the Afghan culture," Cheek said at a news conference. "I've told our commanders, for example, to minimize the number of Afghan nationals or others that they detain."

The U.S. military, which still claims around 18,000 troops here, has taken thousands of prisoners in Afghanistan since Operation Enduring Freedom, Washington's anti-terrorism drive, began after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States.

Those not quickly released are transferred to larger jails at U.S. bases in Bagram and Kandahar, where many have been in the past been sent to the American prison for terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

However, allegations of mistreatment — dating back to be-

fore the prisoner abuse scandal in Iraq — have hurt efforts to win over ordinary Afghans.

Spokesman Maj. Mark McCann said fewer prisoners were now being sent to Guantanamo, reflecting a decline in militant activity in Afghanistan. He also said detainees could be freed this year under a planned amnesty.

The officials gave no figures to show whether detention rates had indeed declined, although Cheek said the three holding facilities under his control at bases in eastern Afghanistan were currently empty.

Asked about the death in September of a prisoner at his own headquarters in the city of Khost, Cheek said the man had complained to a guard that he was bitten by a snake.

A military doctor examined the man, Sher Mohammed Khan, and found no evidence of a bite. But a medic who checked on him during the night found that he had stopped breathing. Doctors were unable to revive him.

Cheek said he had yet to receive the results of the autopsy, but said he was confident his troops were treating every detainee "with dignity and respect."

"If we were to treat those we detain poorly, it would really hurt our overall attempts to win the confidence and trust of the population, so it makes no sense for us to abuse prisoners and I will tell you that we do not do that," he said.

Human Rights Watch last month cited Khan's case in a letter to U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

It accused the Pentagon of dragging its feet on investigating at least eight deaths of Afghan detainees dating back to 2001, and suggested quicker action could have prevented abuses in Iraq — a charge U.S. officials reject.



A U.S. soldier patrols as his colleague shakes hands with an Afghan boy near Pul-e-Charkhi, Afghanistan, on Monday. As part of an effort to win stronger support from the local population, soldiers are taking as few prisoners as possible, a U.S. commander said Monday.

Blinded soldier working to improve his life

BY JENNIFER C. YATES

The Associated Press

DUNBAR, Pa. — Sam Ross Jr. has three laundry hampers in the bedroom of his sparsely furnished trailer. One for jeans, one for T-shirts and the other for underwear. They're always in the same place and same order.

In the family room, he also has a routine. He keeps the 60-inch TV on so he can listen to the History Channel or "Jeopardy," his favorite show.

When he's in the kitchen, he's extra careful around the stove.

He's burned himself several times since returning last year from Iraq blinded by shrapnel from a land mine explosion.

Doctors thought he wouldn't survive. But he hung on, and today the 22-year-old former high school wrestler smiles often as he talks about his ability to go on with his life — often alone, with no sight and a prosthetic leg that starts 6 inches below his left knee.

He has approached his blindness as both a challenge and an opportunity, a chance to make a new start for someone from a troubled family in a small town in rural southwestern Pennsylvania.

He wants to build a house with help from business owners in the community and plans to go to college. He said he thinks he deserves better than the old trailer in the town where he lives now.

Why is he optimistic despite losing his sight? "I don't know," he says. "Never having nothing my whole life, maybe."

Kevlar helmets and vests have improved the survival rate for servicemembers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Blast wounds are better treated in the hospital, along with many serious combat-related eye injuries.

"Troops have traditionally not wanted to wear eye protection because all it might in some way limit their vision," said Col. Thomas Ward, consultant to the U.S. surgeon general in ophthalmology. "Early on, I don't think people



Sam Ross Jr., plays with his golden retriever, Diesel, in his trailer during a December interview in Dunbar, Pa. Ross, a combat engineer with the 82nd Airborne Division, was wounded in May 2003 while disposing of munitions near Baghdad. The 22-year-old former high school wrestler lost sight in both eyes and part of his left leg when a mine he was carrying exploded.

really appreciated how vulnerable the eye was."

Nine percent of the servicemembers wounded in Vietnam had eye injuries. That number rose to 13 percent in the Persian Gulf War, and anecdotally appears to have risen in Iraq, Ward said.

In the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, where about 90 percent of the Army's wounded are treated at some point, 215 eye injuries have been recorded since the start of the Iraq war, Ward said. The figure includes 34 totally blinded in one eye, and four soldiers totally blinded in both eyes.

The lucky ones have had pieces of metal or glass removed from their eyes. Others, suffering direct blasts to the face, had eyes blown out.

Ross, a combat engineer with

the 82nd Airborne Division, was wounded on May 18, 2003, while disposing of munitions near Baghdad.

On his way to a disposal pit, he was cradling a mine in a sand-filled shovel when there was an explosion.

What went wrong? He doesn't know.

He may have hit the mine accidentally with the butt of a rifle slung over his other arm. Or his movements may have been too jarring for the fragile explosives.

Ross was blown into the air, shards of metal and wire cutting into his legs, arms and eyes.

He called for help, wondering what was taking the medical helicopter so long. He expected the worst.

"I said my last words and came to peace that I was going to die,"

he says. He chooses to keep those last words private now.

The shrapnel blew off the side of his right eye, which is now filled with scar tissue. In his left eye, the retina detached, permanently damaging the nerves.

"I remember seeing a black hole," he says. "The pain was so excruciating, my body just went numb."

He was left with some light perception in his left eye, but he keeps his eyelids mostly closed because it's more comfortable.

The military rushed Ross back to the United States within days of the explosion so relatives could see him alive one last time. He was given just 72 hours to live.

Ross spent more than a month in a coma at Walter Reed. He's had more than a dozen surgeries, at least four on his eyes.

During six weeks at the Chicago-based Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center, a facility to help veterans, Ross learned how to use a cane to get around and keep himself oriented. Ross also learned to rely on his other senses.

The process has been helped, he says, by the fact that he remembers what it's like to see and can visualize many situations.

Still, there are many challenges at home in Dunbar, about 40 miles southeast of Pittsburgh.

Ross shares his old beige trailer with his dog, a golden retriever named Diesel. The home belonged to his father, who has been in jail since 1999. Ross hasn't seen his mother in years.

Cousins, an aunt and a girlfriend, Jenna, have helped him get around. But because they all work during the day, he often stays alone in his mobile home, which sits in woods near the end of a gravel road, with few homes nearby.

Dozens of calls have not turned up any group that provides transportation for the blind in his community.

He says he's proud of having served, and eagerly tells stories about his days in Iraq — traveling from city to city in long convoys, taking part in nearly 24-hour street patrols.

"You have to realize that death is imminent. It's part of the battlefield," Ross says.

Battles of a different kind face him now.

He's been dogged by creditors seeking about \$9,800 from a medical procedure he underwent on his eyes after returning home.

The Army is supposed to pay the bill, but officials told Ross they were not paid because of a clerical error. While the Army sorted it out, the hospital turned the issue over to a collection agency.

He's gotten thousands of cards from well-wishers, including a poem about heroes that sits on the fireplace mantle.

Beside the poem are two pictures of Ross and several buddies taken before he was deployed. He smiles, eyes wide open.

Army medics get intensive training before deployment

BY KIMBERLY HEFLING

The Associated Press

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. — Fake blood spewed, smoke billowed, strobe lights flashed and two high-tech dummies with limbs blown off lay on the ground.

"Medic, somebody call a medic!" a woman shrieked as the sound of gunfire erupted from the shadows.

In rushed an out-of-breath Pfc. Merinda Karn with her bag in hand for a test of her medic skills.

As the insurgents in Iraq step up their attacks, the Army has increased the intensity of its training of battlefield medics. That has meant moving the training from classrooms to more realistic settings and teaching medics to keep fighting the enemy — even if it means sometimes delaying treatment of the wounded.

"One medic on the ground returning fire can make the difference between the enemy staying and continuing to fire on us, or saying 'Whoa, I got to go,'" said Capt. Brad Tibbetts, the officer in charge of the Alfred V. Rascon

School of Combat Medicine at Fort Campbell. "That's one thing we teach them — when to delay and when you can't."

This year, about 500 medics and others who work in small, isolated units will undergo training at the school. They attend the class partly to refresh skills they acquired during a 16-week course at Fort Sam Houston in Texas, where all new Army medics take civilian emergency medical technician classes and study battlefield techniques.

Much of the training at the Fort Campbell school is conducted using strikingly lifelike dummies controlled by computers. The dummies "bleed," breathe, blink and have a pulse.

Nearly 90 percent of Americans wounded in Iraq are surviving, compared with 73 percent in Vietnam and 78 percent in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Col. Richard Agee, chief of staff of the U.S. Army Medical Department and School, credited better body armor and better training of medical personnel.

Master Sgt. Luis Rodriguez, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the training at the school, is a former medic who was hit by mortar fire in Iraq. He lost a leg, but the use

of a tourniquet helped save his life. He said the first thing he tells the medics is that the enemy will fire at them even if they are rendering aid, and they must be prepared to fight.

Fort Campbell started holding the final test for the class in a dark room after 101st Airborne Division medics returning from Afghanistan said they were not prepared to treat the wounded without light.

The 20-year-old Karn, who weighs about 140 pounds, was out of breath when she ran in to take the test because she had run six miles that morning and then dragged a 185-pound soldier about 200 yards before dashing into the room.

She flunked the test because in the dark she failed to feel an exit wound in the back of her "casualty," and it died."

Afterward, the lights came on in the room and taps played. An instructor discussed what she did wrong.

"I just wasn't as thorough as I should've been," Karn said, before leaving the room to write a letter to the "casualty's" parents, also part of the medic training.

Tibbetts said it is OK to make mistakes here.



A dummy designed to simulate an injured soldier is attended to during combat medic training Nov. 18 at the Alfred V. Rascon School of Combat Medicine at Fort Campbell, Ky.

Pledging aid from afar

Members of U.S. military communities in Europe raise money for tsunami victims in South Asia

BY RICK EMERT
Stars and Stripes

While an international outpouring of support is going to tsunami victims from online donations, some people from U.S. military communities in Europe are also doing their part to raise a little money for disaster relief efforts.

Roger Walker, a third-grader at Darmstadt Elementary School, went door-to-door in his Santa Barbara housing area in Germany to collect "pocket change" from the children of the house.

Walker, 9, said seeing the devastation in the countries hit by the tsunami compelled him to spend New Year's Day pounding the pavement.

"I was watching the news and saw all these hurting people who don't have any money, and I thought it would be a good idea to give them money."

Collecting only from other kids, Walker raised \$114 and 38 euro.

"I figured that the adults would be asked elsewhere, like at the office or the unit," Walker said. "I knocked on the door and asked if it was OK for the kids to donate their pocket change. The parents all said it was OK, and the kids gave me 50 cents or \$1 or \$20, or whatever they had."

At the Rhein-Main Air Base commissary in Germany, head bagger Yupa Conway donated three days' wages totaling \$660 and 40 euro.

Conway, the wife of a Stars and Stripes employee, initially put out a donation box, but the commissary management said it would make the customers uncomfortable and they may feel obligated to give more than they normally would have given for a tip.

Instead, Conway donated all of her tips.

"I am from Thailand, and my cousin still lives on the beach [where the tsunami hit]," she



MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

Above: Roger Walker, a third-grader at Darmstadt Elementary School, went door to door at the Santa Barbara housing area in Germany and collected \$114 and 38 euros from fellow children for tsunami victims. **Right:** Yupa Conway, head bagger at the Rhein-Main Air Base commissary in Germany, donated three days' wages totaling \$660 and 40 euros to the earthquake and tsunami victims in Thailand.

said. "I was scared, but we know now that she is safe."

Conway and her family visit the beach where her cousin lives every year. They last visited in July.

"All of the damage that was done there makes me cry," Conway said. "I want to help the best that I can. I feel I have to try to help them."

The money raised will be sent directly to the Thai ambassador to the United States in Washington, D.C. The embassy Web

site (www.thaibmcd.org) has a routing and account number for people to donate money through their bank account.

In Bamberg, Germany, the American Red Cross office received many calls Monday from people who wanted to donate money or clothing.

Said Jenni Pittard, field office assistant.

"All we are taking right now is

"I was watching the news and saw all these hurting people who don't have any money, and I thought it would be a good idea to give them money."

Roger Walker
Darmstadt Elementary student

donations of money, because what the people there need is food and water — the basics," Pittard said.

She added that monetary donations could be made at any local field office of the American Red Cross on any military installation, and the money goes directly to tsunami and earthquake victims.

Donations can be made online at www.redcross.org. The Web site also has a link for anyone seeking information on friends or family who were in the area when the earthquake and tsunami hit.

At Bamberg Elementary School, teachers were to hold a faculty meeting after school Monday — the first day back from winter break — to discuss some of the options for students who were interested in helping tsunami victims.

With many Web pages offering links to make donations for tsunami victims, charitable organizations already have received millions of dollars to support the relief effort.

But the efforts of people such as Conway and Walker put more than a little heart behind the money they raise to help the hungry and homeless in the wake of one of the worst natural disasters in modern history.

"I feel kind of proud that I thought about this myself and that I did something to help people who lost everything there," Walker said.

"I feel good a little bit," Conway said. "I know this is not much, but I feel so happy to be able to do something to help."

E-mail Rick Emert at:
emert@mail.estripes.osd.mil

Survey: Women at Naval Academy feeling better about surroundings

The Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Women at the Naval Academy are feeling more at home at the military college, according to the latest survey of midshipmen.

The anonymous survey, administered by the academy annually since 1994, shows female midshipmen are more at ease in their relationships with male midshipmen, feel safer at their coed dorms and are less hindered by concerns of sexual harassment.

"We're hopeful it reflects a greater level of comfort and less angst between men and women in the brigade," said Vice Adm. Rodney Rempt, superintendent of the academy.

About 16 percent of students at the acad-

emy are female. A total of 2,777 midshipmen, including 443 women, took the survey in October; 3,125 upperclassmen were eligible. The findings, recently presented to the school's oversight board, were reported Sunday by The (Baltimore) Sun.

The survey showed student satisfaction with the academy rose to 90 percent. That's compared with 83 percent in 2003, a year that saw the resignation of superintendent Vice Adm. Richard Naughton and several high-profile allegations of sexual assault.

Overall, military experts said the results indicate a widespread shift in the attitudes of male combat leaders during a time of war.

"I think women are finally getting more

respect from the men in the military because they are proving themselves in the war in Iraq," said Loy Manning, a retired Navy captain with the Washington-based Women's Research and Education Institute.

"Because of this, some of the sexist attitudes are being done away with."

The survey asked midshipmen about dating, academics, safety, harassment and other aspects of life at the academy.

Of the women who responded, 90 percent said they accept dating between midshipmen, up from 51 percent in 2003. Among male midshipmen, 71 percent reported an acceptance of interbrigade dating, compared with 47 percent in 2003.

Ninety-seven percent of the women said

they feel safe sleeping in the school's coed dorm, up from 87 percent four years ago. Seven percent said sexual harassment has impeded their development at the school, down from 13 percent in 2003.

Of the respondents, 0.5 percent — the equivalent of 14 midshipmen — said they have been forced to engage in sexual activity against their will, down from more than double that number in 2000. The anonymous reports aren't supported by any criminal reports filed in the past year. The academy's report didn't give a male-female breakdown for that question.

Although racial attitudes have improved overall, 17 percent of the black respondents said racial prejudice has impeded their development as midshipmen, up from 12 percent in 2003.



RAYMOND T. CONWAY/Stars and Stripes

IN THE WORLD

Ex-presidents to lead tsunami fund-raising

Bush taps father, Clinton in attempt to draw private donations for victims

By TERENCE HUNT
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Bush on Monday tapped two former presidents — his father, President George H.W. Bush, and his predecessor, President Clinton — to lead a nationwide, private fund-raising campaign to help victims of the Asian tsunami.

"I ask every American to contribute as they are able to do so," Bush said in the White House's Roosevelt Room, the two former presidents at his side.

Clinton and the first President Bush are to lead an effort to encourage the American people and businesses to support relief and reconstruction activities in areas devastated by the tsunami, the president said. He also ordered that American flags fly at half-staff all week in sympathy for "the victims of a great tragedy," particularly the many thousands of dead and orphaned children.

"In the coming days, Presidents Clinton and Bush will ask Americans to donate directly to reliable charities, thereby providing help to tsunami victims," Bush said. "I've asked the former presidents to solicit contributions both large and small."

The president urged Ameri-

cans to give money instead of other items. "Cash donations are most useful," he said.

The announcement came as the White House has been scrambling to repair an image battered at home and abroad by perceptions that U.S. aid for the tsunami lagged behind other countries — especially considering the outpouring of support for America from other countries in the hours and days immediately following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Bush himself has not yet made a personal contribution, but plans to give an unspecified amount, McClellan said.

Later Monday, Bush, accompanied by first lady Laura Bush as well as his father and Clinton, paid brief visits to the embassies of the four nations hit hardest by the disaster — Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand.

At the Indonesian and Indian embassies, Laura Bush presented officials with bouquets of white roses and the foursome signed condolence books.

The president also was waiting to hear back from a delegation he dispatched to the region to assess what more the United States government can do to help. That team, led by Secretary of State Colin Powell and the president's brother, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, arrived in the region Monday.



President Bush announces Monday in the Roosevelt Room at the White House that he is appointing former presidents George H.W. Bush, left, and Bill Clinton, right, to head up efforts to raise money for the massive American relief operation in the tsunami-battered regions of Asia.

The president's words of condolence

WASHINGTON — President Bush signed messages of condolence Monday for the four nations hit hardest by the tsunami. The messages also were signed by first lady Laura Bush and former presidents Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush. Here is what the president wrote in each book:

Indonesia: "May God bless all those who suffer."

India: "We pray for the victims of this disaster and we stand firmly with the people of India as she

recovers."

Sri Lanka: "We pray for victims and families of this epic disaster, and the American government and American people are dedicated to helping you recover."

Thailand: "We pray for the victims and families of this epic disaster. The American people and government stand with you as you recover and rebuild."

— The Associated Press

U.S. aid effort picks up steam Task force official outlines relief plans

By LELY T. DJUHARI
The Associated Press

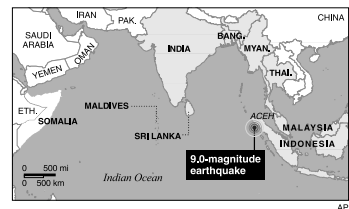
BANDA ACEH, Indonesia — A massive American military relief operation picked up steam Monday, with U.S. helicopters dropping off cartons of food aid in the Malacca Straits to ferry supplies to the tsunami-battered Indonesian island.

As the death toll around the Indian Ocean rim approached 140,000, a delegation led by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Florida Gov. Jeb Bush began a trip that will include stops in Thailand, Indonesia and possibly Sri Lanka.

U.S. Navy helicopters rescued dozens of weakened survivors along Sumatra's devastated west coast, carrying them to a hospital in Banda Aceh.

Searchers all but gave up of finding more survivors from the Dec. 26 killer earthquake and tsunami, with authorities saying that thousands listed as missing were presumed dead. The world turned its full attention to getting food and water to the living.

Searchers died from the disaster reached 139,253 after hardest-hit Indonesia increased its death toll to 94,081, and Sri Lanka and Thailand both raised their tolls by lesser amounts. Aid agencies have said the death toll was



expected to hit 150,000. Sri Lanka, India and Thailand said they were prepared to give up on the more than 15,000 people still unaccounted for.

Aid workers were trying to help millions of people displaced and devastated by losses of family and friends put their towns and villages back together.

On Monday, the USS Bonhomme Richard and two other warships carrying a Marine expeditionary unit, dozens of helicopters and tons of supplies steamed into the Indian Ocean to join relief operations off the northwest coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island.

Later this week, the ship was to begin operations off Sri Lanka. The Pentagon also has decided

to send the USNS Mercy, a 1,000-bed hospital ship based at San Diego, to join the relief effort, two officials said Monday on condition of anonymity.

The U.S. helicopters carried about 60 survivors — including two pregnant women and some so weak they could neither walk nor talk — to the Banda Aceh hospital after the American military got permission from Jakarta to pick up those in bad shape. Many had little food or water for eight days, and they suffered from ailments including pneumonia, broken bones, infected wounds, tetanus and trauma.

Several also were brought to the USS Abraham Lincoln on stretchers.

By FRED ZIMMERMAN
Stars and Stripes

UTAPAO, Thailand — More than a week after a massive, deadly tsunami, U.S. military personnel are flowing steadily into the area with supplies for a massive humanitarian relief mission.

All U.S. military efforts in the region fall under Joint Task Force 536, being commanded by Lt. Gen. Robert R. Blackman of the Okinawa, Japan-based III Marine Expeditionary Force. The task force headquarters, an air base here, also is a major embarkation point for relief supplies.

"We're gathering relief supplies here and distributing them from here," said Marine Lt. Col. Robert Krieg, a joint task force operations planning team member. Three disaster relief assessment teams, in Sri Lanka, Phuket, Thailand, and Indonesia, "are determining what the need is."

Current plans are to use Utapao as the central hub and airlift supplies out to the "spokes," said Marine Lt. Col. Pat Martin, also on the operations planning team. Teams throughout the region will request supplies needed most in

their areas. "They're going to know better what they need than we will," he said.

"Things are just going to ramp up from here," Krieg said. Units already are beginning to converge on the region in advance of the assessment teams' final reports, he said.

Ships from Expeditionary Strike Group 5 already are sitting off Sumatra, Krieg said, using 17 helicopters to deliver relief supplies to Indonesia.

Many more troops are yet to arrive in the region, but more than 800 U.S. military personnel already are on the ground with the task force.

"This is going to be the biggest joint task force I've ever seen," Martin said.

While a recent humanitarian relief mission to the Philippines lasted several weeks, Krieg predicted the tsunami's damage is so severe, and relief efforts are likely to be so extensive, that this operation will take much longer.

"This isn't going to be a quick two-week operation for us," he said. "We'll probably measure this one in months."

E-mail Fred Zimmerman at: zimmermanf@strpsjcs.osd.mil

Thailand exhumes 300 misidentified victims

BY ALISA TANG

The Associated Press

PHUKET, Thailand — Forensic experts have begun exhuming 300 tsunami victims in Thailand after discovering their bodies apparently were mislabeled in the rush to bury the dead before they decomposed in the tropical heat, officials said Monday.

In the hopes of avoiding further confusion, Thai government officials and police urged friends and relatives seeking information about the missing to stay away from the disaster area and temporary morgues so forensic experts could do their jobs.

"Relatives want to come here, but we would like them to stay in their home countries and collect information on medical and dental records," Foreign Minister Surakiat Sathirathai said, referring to the beavered a special Web site pooling information on the missing.

Teams of more than 200 forensic experts from Thailand and 18 other countries are working frantically at Buddhist temples that serve as makeshift morgues to identify the dead, many of whom were foreign tourists.

At one, several hundred bodies lay on the ground, covered by tarps or body bags. Another hundred lay in the sun. A man sprayed a cloud of disinfectant.

Some of the beaches least affected by the walls of water that battered a long stretch of the country's southern coast Dec. 26 already have been largely cleaned and swimmers and tourists were out swimming and sunning themselves.

With 5,046 confirmed deaths and 3,810 people still listed as missing, Thailand's official death toll could be as high as 8,000, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has warned. The total number of people killed in 11 nations was approaching 150,000 on Monday.

With Thaksin saying Sunday that Thailand no longer needs financial assistance, the focus was on finding and identifying bodies, along with maintaining the flow of aid to the needy and finding longer-term housing for people who lost their homes.

Heavy machinery worked on the ruins of posh resorts that were flattened around Khao Lak beach, about 50 miles north of Phuket, where Thaksin said the situation remained "quite severe." Elephants helped clear debris.

Leading Thai forensic expert Porntip Rorjanasund said 300 victims, all Thais and other Asians, were being exhumed.

"When the relatives come to try to claim the victims' bodies, it turned out they had the wrong number," she said. "The local of-

fices did not put tags on the bodies properly, so we are trying to re-identify them. No one understood how important it is to have the appropriate tagging and labeling. The last two days, we have had the problem of digging up bodies."

In one case, a Thai family admitted it had mistakenly claimed the body of a woman that was brought from Phuket to Bangkok. It turned out to be the body of a 23-year-old Philippine choreographer and ballet dance instructor.

"There were just too many casualties or maybe because Thais and Filipinos look the same. We don't know, but in a disaster of this magnitude, confusion is bound to happen," said Hector Cruz, a Manila-based labor official helping families locate dead, injured or missing relatives in Thailand.

Officials sought to increase their refrigeration capacity to store bodies while DNA samples, fingerprints and dental records are obtained so identification can be made later.

Swit Khunkitti, minister of natural resources and environment, said relatives of foreign victims can send DNA samples from their missing loved ones to be matched here in Thailand. Surakiat said relatives should come to the area only when there is a positive identification.

Associated Press writer Miranda Leisinger contributed to this story.



Thai soldiers carry a coffin from a pile at Yan Yaw temple in Takuapa district of Pang-Nga province, southern Thailand, on Monday. Forensic experts have begun exhuming 300 tsunami victims in Thailand after discovering their bodies apparently were mislabeled.

Families struggle to recognize relatives

Sri Lanka hospital posts photos hoping for identifications

BY CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA

The Associated Press

GALLE, Sri Lanka — Balage Shriyani held an old photograph of her 7-year-old daughter, dressed up for a school concert in bangles, makeup and a yellow, ankle-length dress, against a new photograph of a bloated corpse in a sodden blouse.

"It's her," Shriyani sobbed, sinking her head onto her outstretched arm. She had recognized her daughter, Sajini Kaushalya, in a hospital gallery of photographs of unknown victims who died in the Asian tsunami that devastated swaths of the Sri Lankan coast.

Staff at Karapitiya, the main hospital in the southern coastal city of Galle, pasted hundreds of photographs on the walls of a ward on Sunday in hopes that relatives of the missing would be able to identify loved ones. The hospital buried about 1,100 bodies earlier in the week, but was unable to identify any of those, deputy director C.D. Pathirage said.

Medics photographed the bodies, took their fingerprints and removed jewelry for possible return to relatives before burying them, but acknowledged that it



Tsunami survivor Balage Shriyani recognizes her missing daughter, Sajini Kaushalya, from a lineup of pictures showing unidentified victims who had to be buried in mass graves. The photos were posted Sunday at the mortuary in the Karapitiya hospital in southern Sri Lanka.

was unlikely they would be able to identify all.

Many of the color photographs show bodies distorted by decomposition, their faces swollen beyond recognition, eyeballs and tongues protruding, lips pulled back in permanent grimaces.

"All the facial features had changed," said hospital doctor S.P.A. Hewage, who hoped families would instead recognize shirts, trousers, belt buckles and tattoos in the photographs. Some of those who died in the tsunami waves a week ago were amputees, making identification easier, he said.

The photographs were displayed in a hall that was recently built as a playground for mentally ill children, and served as a makeshift morgue when truckloads of bodies arrived at the hospital after the disaster. Shriyani studied row after row of gruesome images before identifying the green checkered pattern with red trim

of the sleeveless blouse that the girl was wearing on the day of her death.

Shriyani described how she was breast-feeding her 19-day-old baby at her home on the eastern outskirts of Galle when she heard a noise that sounded like a dynamite explosion. She grabbed her two other children and ran away, but the waves soon overpowered them.

While Shriyani later found her boy and revived him by pushing on his stomach to make him cough up the sea water, she did not know what had happened to her girl until she saw the photograph on Sunday.

Only a trickle of relatives visited the gallery of photographs on Sunday, partly because the hospital was still trying to get the word out to families who were missing loved ones.

"It's a very difficult process," Pathirage said. "Sometimes the whole family has died, so there are no relations to identify them."

Village picks up pieces

The Associated Press

NAGAPPATTINAM, India — As dawn brings the first rays of light into the deserted fishing hamlet of Nambiar Nagar, a few locals venture in. An hour later, more people arrive and by mid-morning, the place is teeming.

They are the residents of the fishing village on the edge of the Bay of Bengal who fled as last week's tsunami hit. Many survivors are now returning from government relief camps inland to pick up the pieces and resume their lives.

India's official death toll from the Dec. 26 tsunami, which battered a dozen nations from Asia to Africa, is more than 9,000, most in southern Tamil Nadu state. The United Nations estimates the total number of people killed in the disaster to reach 150,000.

Six days after the carnage, survivors have returned to their rustic huts to assess the damage. With little outside help, they are putting back the wooden planks, tightening loosened poles, cleaning out knee-deep sludge and resurrecting their homes.

The steps back are tentative, as survivors grapple with an urge to go home amid fear that another wave may hit.

Many spend the day in their villages, but return to the relief camps at night.

The community center in Nambiar Nagar, a fishing hamlet in the town of Nagappattinam, is one of the few structures that survived the tsunami. Its shelves are stocked with relief supplies.

Victims line up for bags of daily rations: rice, lentils and biscuits.

As the day wanes, the residents head back to the crowded chaos of the camps.

Europe counts tsunami loss

The Associated Press

OSLO, Norway — The names of missing parents, children, spouses and loved ones printed on Web sites and newspapers and scrolling across TV screens brought home to the Norwegians the force of the south Asian tsunami as residents pondered the fate of nearly 3,500 missing.

Elsewhere across Europe, the enormity of the earthquake-propelled tsunami that destroyed popular vacation destinations for Europeans hit home as more Britons, French, Germans and others remained unaccounted for.

In Britain, 40 people are reported dead, according to the Association of British Travel Agents. Officials have said 159 Britons remain missing.

France has lost 22 citizens in the disaster, and another 99 are missing, said Renaud Muselier,

the country's secretary of state for foreign affairs.

In Germany, 60 people have been reported killed and 1,000 are missing.

Norway's national crime police, Kripos, said Monday that 16 Norwegians were killed in the tsunami. Kripos also cut the number of missing to 242, including 43 children, from the earlier estimate of 462.

In Finland, 14 Finns are known dead and 183 more missing.

In the Baltics, Latvia is still searching for 15 of its citizens and Estonia said three of its people had not been accounted for.

In Denmark there was some relief after the number of missing Danes fell to 69, even though National Police warned that another 100 were not accounted for.

In Sweden, some 2,915 Swedes are still missing and 52 were confirmed killed.

Malaysian tuna boat rescues woman after five days of clinging to palm tree

BY SEAN YOONG
The Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — A Malaysian tuna ship rescued an Indonesian woman who drifted for five days in the Indian Ocean after last week's tsunami swept her out to sea from her home on Sumatra island, an official said Monday.

Melawati, 23, was spotted alive Friday while clinging to a floating sago palm tree in waters near Aceh province, said Gai Kim Par, manager of the Malaysian International Tuna Port. Melawati uses only one name.

She suffered leg injuries be-

cause of being bitten by fish at sea and was extremely weak, but remained conscious and arrived for medical treatment Monday afternoon at Malaysia's northwestern Penang island, Gol added.

Penang Health Director Azmi Shapie said Melawati — who survived by eating the tree's fruit and bark — suffered trauma and would be given counseling because she was being handed to the Indonesian consulate in Penang.

Ship crewmembers told Malaysia's national news agency, Bernama, that Melawati had waved frantically to draw the trawler's attention and was found clad in only her underpants because her

clothes had been ripped to shreds. She cried throughout her three days aboard the trawler, they added.

Also, four Indonesian fishermen found alive had been on a boat that drifted north for nine days to a remote Indian Ocean island, the Indian coast guard said. The boat's engine broke down before the tsunami hit, said Anil K. Pokhriyal, commander of the coast guard ship.

The men, suffering from shock, were rescued by the coast guard Saturday off Campbell Bay, Pokhriyal told The Associated Press.

They were brought to Port Blair, capital of the Indian archipelago of Andaman and Nicobar islands, on Monday.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian government said it will allow the country's airspace and at least two airports to be used for tsunami relief operations in Indonesia.

The U.N. World Food Program is expected to use the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Airport on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur as a staging post for supplies to be dropped off before they are sent on to Aceh province on Sumatra island, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Malaysia also will let the United States use its airspace and northern Langkawi airport to dispatch humanitarian assistance to Aceh, the statement added.

Regional officials have said airports in the Sumatran towns of Medan and Banda Aceh are over-stretched because of the massive amount of aid and personnel arriving.



An Aceh woman who lost her father in the Dec. 26 tsunami weeps Monday in Meulaboh, Aceh province, Indonesia. The tsunami hit the province, killing almost 100,000 people.



Melawati is carried away by hospital staff members at the Malaysian International Tuna Port in Penang on Monday. A Malaysian tuna ship rescued Melawati who drifted for five days in the Indian Ocean.

Indonesia seeks tsunami warnings

Nation will host conference later this week to discuss system, aid

BY LELY T. DJUHARI
The Associated Press

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia — Indonesia said Monday it plans to establish an early warning system for disasters with its neighbors, as its death toll from last week's earthquake and tsunami jumped to almost 100,000.

Indonesia, which suffered the most deaths and destruction in last week's disaster, will host a conference later this week of nations hit and major aid donors that is likely to focus on how best to deliver relief efforts.

Participants, including U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and senior United Nations officials, may also discuss ways to establish a multi-country warning system.

Officials say an untold number of deaths could have been prevented if such a system — which exists in the Pacific Ocean — had been in place on Dec. 26, when a massive earthquake off Indonesia's Sumatra island sent huge waves surging into coastlines of at least a dozen countries on the edge of the Indian Ocean. The death toll is expected to top 150,000 people.

"Indonesia and other neighboring countries plan to set up an early warning to prevent natural disasters, including earthquake and tsunamis," President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono told reporters Monday. "This would be a kind of pre-emptive measure."

Yudhoyono didn't specify which countries would be involved, how the impoverished nation planned to finance the system, or how it would work.

Thai Foreign Minister Surakiat Sathirathai, speaking Monday in Phuket, said some of the millions of dollars in donations pouring into the affected countries should be spent on the system.

"One of the most important

things we would like to work on with the United States and several European countries... is the immediate installation of the early warning system and the monitoring system," Surakiat said.

Regional leaders were expected to endorse establishing a tsunami early warning system at Thursday's conference, organized by the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

But experts say making such a system work will be an expensive and complex task.

Also Monday, Minister of Justice and Human Rights Hamid Awaludin said the government has issued a policy aimed at human traffickers who might prey on children orphaned in the disaster.

"Beginning today all Acehese children up to 16 years old are banned from being brought abroad," Awaludin told reporters after a Cabinet meeting. "This policy is aimed at anticipating the issue of child trafficking as well as illegal adoption of the orphans."

Unconfirmed reports in Indonesia say dozens of children whose parents were killed have already been taken by unidentified people, some of them possibly child traffickers.

On a positive note, officials said they found an Indonesian fisherman on Sunday who had been trapped under his boat since the tsunami overturned it onto him a week earlier.

Tengku Sofyan, 24, was being treated for severe dehydration at a hospital in Banda Aceh. He could barely speak and had cuts on his body, doctors said.

"He's in extremely fragile condition, especially mentally," said Dr. Irwan Azwar, his doctor.

Witnesses said Sofyan was at sea when the tsunami hit Dec. 26. His boat was tossed onto the beach at Lampulo, trapping him underneath.

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Six go on trial in Paris for plot to bomb U.S. Embassy

The Associated Press

PARIS — Six men, including a top terrorism suspect in France, were going on trial Monday accused of plotting to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Paris — a plan allegedly concocted in terror training camps in Afghanistan.

The trial is expected to highlight the overlapping tentacles of terror networks in Europe.

The investigation into the alleged plot was opened on Sept. 10, 2001 — a day before the U.S. terror attacks — following the arrest of suspected ringleader Djamel Beghal.

The suspects are charged with criminal association with a terrorist enterprise, and risk up to 10 years in prison if convicted. The trial is to last until Feb. 16.

Beghal, 39, a French-Algerian, was arrested in July 2001 in the United Arab Emirates after leaving Afghanistan. He was carrying an illegally obtained French passport.

During two months of detention in Dubai, he told local authorities of a plot to target U.S. interests in France, notably the U.S. Embassy, and said the scheme was ordered by Osama bin Laden's terror network, officials said at the time.

Beghal identified a Tunisian accomplice — professional soccer player Nizar Trabelsi — who was to enter the U.S. Embassy wearing a bomb belt.

However, Beghal later recanted that testimony during questioning in France and suggested he had been tortured in Dubai and forced to make up the story, officials have said.

One of his lawyers, Claire Doubiez, said he would describe the circumstances of his Dubai interrogation, including the alleged mistreatment, during the trial.

Trabelsi is serving a 10-year sentence in Belgium for plotting bomb attacks on U.S. military per-

sonnel and involvement in an al-Qaida-linked ring in Europe.

Beghal provided information to investigators that led to the arrest of several other suspects, including Kamel Daoudi, 30, a quiet computer expert arrested in Britain in 2002 with fake identity documents after fleeing his home in a southern Paris suburb.

According to the prosecution, Daoudi was to send information about the preparation for the attack to Afghanistan via the Internet — and receive the green light for the attack in the same way.

The French investigation uncovered links between the suspects on trial here and others in Belgium, like Trabelsi, and in the Netherlands where Jerome Courtailler, a French convert to Islam, was tried in the U.S. Embassy plot.

He was acquitted in 2002 in the case, but that was overturned by an appeals court that sentenced him to six years in prison.

Group: Killings in Iraq make 2004 deadliest year in decade for media

BY PAUL AMES

The Associated Press

BRUSSELS, Belgium — Killings in Iraq made 2004 the deadliest year in a decade for media professionals with 117 killed gathering news around the world, an international media watchdog reported.

"Iraq was the most dangerous place in the world for journalists and their teams," the International News Safety Institute said Sunday. It listed 42 dead there, all but six of them Iraqis.

Elsewhere, the deadliest places were the Philippines with 12 media staff killed, India with eight, and Brazil, Mexico and Bangladesh with five each.

The organization said it was the worst year since 1994, when 157 news men and women died mostly in Rwanda, Bosnia, Chechnya, Somalia and Angola.

"The global death toll for jour-

nalists and those who work with them is horrifying, and nowhere more than in Iraq where unbelievably brave men and women daily risk bullets, bombs and kidnapping," INSI Director Rodney Pinder said in a statement.

The group's list includes support staff such as translators and drivers as well as journalists themselves.

The U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists last month also reported the worst year in a decade, but its list was restricted to journalists and gave 54 dead.

Pinder said many of those killed were deliberately targeted because of media work in their homelands.

He called for governments to take tougher action to bring their killers to justice.

"It's a frightening fact that, as in previous years, most journalists who died were not special-

trained international war correspondents parachuted knowingly into danger, but people covering daily stories in their own conflict-ridden countries," he said.

"It's high time that countries with journalists' blood on their hands took effective action to find and prosecute their killers."

Among those killed were five Iraqis who died in October when a car bomb targeted the Baghdad bureau of the Dubai-based TV network Al-Arabiya.

Among the others named: Alberto Rivera Fernandez gunned down after covering corruption in his native Peru; Paul Ushukov, editor of Forbes magazine's Russian edition, shot by unknown assailants after leaving his Moscow office; and Dendra Thapa of Nepal, kidnapped and killed by Maoist rebels.

The INSI was founded in 2003 by a coalition of media organizations to work to improve media safety around the world.

Cuba re-establishes Europe contacts

HAVANA — Cuba said Monday it had re-established formal contacts with European nations including France, Germany and Britain in a quest to normalize relations after a nearly two-year-long freeze.

Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said the decision was made after a European Union commission recommended that member states stop inviting Cuban dissidents to national holiday celebrations at their embassies in Havana.

"Due to these pronouncements, Cuba has made the decision to re-establish formal contacts with a group of countries from the European Union," Roque told a news conference.

Roque said Cuban authorities would immediately start meeting with ambassadors from eight European countries: France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Austria, Greece, Portugal and Sweden.

Mom allegedly tosses baby out window

MADRID, Spain — A Spanish woman has been arrested on suspicion of killing her newborn son by throwing him out the window of a third-story apartment, police said Monday.

The 30-year-old woman's mother and sister, who lived with her, also were arrested over Sunday's incident in the town of Burjassot in eastern Valencia province, a police official there said.

He said the mother's motive was not known. News reports said the infant still had his umbilical cord attached when he was thrown from the window, hit a car and landed on the sidewalk. Police found him just barely alive. The child died later in a hospital.

The woman is scheduled to go before a judge on Tuesday for a preliminary hearing, the news agency Efe said.

From The Associated Press



Snow-covered Black Angus cows are shown in a ranch outside the southern Alberta city of Medicine Hat. On Sunday, Canada confirmed its second case of mad cow disease, just days after the United States said it planned to reopen its border to Canadian beef.

Canada confirms second case of mad cow disease

BY ROB GILLIES

The Associated Press

TORONTO — Canada's second confirmed case of mad cow disease won't change plans by the United States to reopen its border to Canadian beef, U.S. agriculture officials said.

Canada's Food Inspection Agency said Sunday that an older dairy cow from the province of Alberta has tested positive for bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or mad cow disease. The results confirmed preliminary tests released earlier this week.

Canada suspects the cow became infected through contaminated animal feed. The cow was born in 1996, before a 1997 ban on certain types of feed, the agency said. It did not enter the human food or animal feed supply and posed no risk to the public, the agency said.

BSE affects a animal's nervous system. Food contaminated with BSE can afflict people with usually fatal variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Canadian officials say the United States was aware of the suspected case when they made their suspicions known on Wednesday, the same day the U.S. Agriculture Department said it was planning to reopen the border to Canadian beef in March. Despite learning of the new suspected case, the U.S. government said the next day that it would stand by its decision to renew Canadian cattle imports.

The border was closed to Canadian beef 19 months ago when a cow in northern Alberta was discovered with mad cow disease.

Concerns persisted after a Canadian-born cow in Washington state was found in December 2003 to have the disease.

On Sunday, U.S. agriculture officials reiterated support for lifting the ban.

"I don't anticipate that this confirmation will change implementation of our rule," said department spokeswoman Alisa Harrison. "I think it's pretty much where we were last week. We've been working closely with Canadian officials."

Harrison said the department based its decision to lift the ban on guidelines set by the World Health Organization showing Canada to be a minimal risk and took into consideration the possibility of additional mad cow cases in Canada.

Under the WHO guidelines, Harrison said, a country with 5.5 million head of cattle over 24 months of age, such as Canada, would still be considered a minimal risk if it had 11 cases of mad cow disease in a year.

Still, Canada seemed to be holding its breath. The country sold more than 70 percent of its live cattle to the United States before the ban — a market worth \$1.5 billion in 2002.

Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin spoke to President Bush on Friday about the new suspected case and Bush assured him that his administration was committed to reopening the border, a Canadian official said on condition of anonymity.

Since BSE was first diagnosed in Britain in 1986, there have been more than 180,000 cases of the chronic, degenerative disorder.

IN THE STATES

Two issues likely to split new Congress

BY CHARLES BABINGTON
AND MIKE ALLEN

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The 109th Congress was set to convene Tuesday with pageantry and pleasantries, but two lurking, potentially explosive issues could turn it into one of the most partisan and contentious sessions in recent times.

Just as judicial nominations have become unusually divisive, senators are anticipating the first Supreme Court vacancy in more than a decade. And President Bush is proposing significant changes to Social Security, the popular entitlement program that many Democrats consider a vital and inviolable legacy of their party.

The new Congress will address hundreds of other questions, such as whether to limit civil liabilities, review immigration laws and drill for oil in an Alaskan refuge. But politicians from left to right agree that those issues cannot rock the Capitol like the battles over the high court and the federal retirement program.

"Those are going to be the two epic fights in 2005," said Richard Lessor, executive director of the American Conservative Union. Aides said Bush plans to kick off the Social Security debate with a major speech even before his second inauguration on Jan. 20. Aides also said Bush plans to use the pressure on Congress with a series of road trips that will include stops in areas with heavy concentrations of seniors so he can assure them they could not lose their checks under his proposals. Signaling his plans to work for all the major parts of his agenda, Bush will fly Wednesday to Illinois to make his case for medical liability reform.

In many respects, the 109th Congress will resemble the 108th, which adjourned last month. Republicans again control the White House as well as both chambers of Congress, though by relatively small margins.

Outwardly, the 435-member House has barely changed, with Republicans gaining three seats in November and both parties keeping their leadership teams in place.

The Nov. 2 elections brought

more change to the 100-seat Senate.

Republicans netted four additional seats, boosting their once-tingy majority to a more comfortable 55 and, in the process, ousting the Democrats' leader of the past decade, Tom Daschle of South Dakota. But Democrats still hold enough seats to mount filibusters, the delaying strategy that requires 60 votes to halt. With Chief Justice William Rehnquist, 80, battling thyroid cancer, Senate Democrats soon may face a high-stakes decision on whether to filibuster a Supreme Court nomination, a move certain to ignite a ferocious fight with Bush and Republican senators. Democrats in 2004 used filibusters to block 10 conservative appellate court nominees who they said were outside the political mainstream. Frist has called the practice intolerable and threatened to rule that filibusters against judicial nominees are unconstitutional. Democrats say they would respond with an avalanche of parliamentary maneuvers that would bring the entire Senate to a halt.

For now, both parties are playing a game of political chicken, unwilling to signal their intentions or temper their threats. Some Republicans say they can't believe Democrats would filibuster a Supreme Court nomination, which would draw widespread attention. But many liberal groups will press Democrats to do just that if Bush nominates a staunch, conservative who, among other things, might seek to outlaw abortion.

The House plays a role in judicial nominations, but it will be in the midst of the other major looming battle: Social Security revisions. Bush has called for allowing workers to divert some of their payroll taxes to private accounts, which could be invested in stocks and bonds. Critics from both parties say the president has not explained how he will pay for the revisions, and many Democrats oppose any change whatsoever in Social Security.

Meanwhile, some prominent Republicans have their own proposals, suggesting Bush will have to unify his own party before pushing legislation through Congress.

U.S. probes laser beams

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Federal officials are investigating an incident in which a laser beam was aimed at a jet it left Nashville International Airport after it was shot down.

Federal agents are looking into similar incidents involving lasers and aircraft, including cases in Cleveland, Washington, D.C.; Houston; Colorado Springs, Colo.; Medford, Ore.; and Teterboro, N.J.

Laser beams can temporarily blind or disorient pilots and possibly cause a plane to crash.

From wire reports



Bella Abzug, left, and Shirley Chisholm, both Democratic representatives from New York, speak in Washington, following a congressional hearing on racism in the military in November 1971. Chisholm, the first black woman elected to Congress, died Saturday. She was 80.

AP

Shirley Chisholm dies at 80

First black woman elected to Congress and first black person to run for U.S. presidency in 1972

BY CORALIE CARLSON

The Associated Press

MIAMI — Shirley Chisholm, an advocate for minority rights who became the first black woman elected to Congress and later the first black person to seek a major party's nomination for the U.S. presidency, has died. She was 80.

Chisholm, who took her seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1969, was a riveting speaker who often criticized Congress as being too clubby and unresponsive. An outspoken champion of women and minorities during seven terms in the House, she also was a staunch critic of the Vietnam War.

She had been in declining health since suffering a series of small strokes last summer and died Saturday.

Chisholm ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1972, a campaign that was viewed

as more symbolic than practical. She won 152 delegates before withdrawing from the race.

"I ran for the Presidency, despite hopeless odds, to demonstrate the sheer will and refusal to accept the status quo," Chisholm said in her book "The Good Fight." "The next time a woman runs, or a black, a Jew or anyone from a group that the country is 'not ready' to elect to its highest office, I believe that he or she will be taken seriously from the start."

Chisholm represented New York's Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn and served until retiring in 1983. She also was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson called her a "woman of great courage."

Newly elected, she was assigned to the House Agriculture Committee, which she felt was irrelevant to her urban constituency.

In an unheard-of move, she demanded reassignment and got switched to the Veterans Affairs Committee.

Not long afterward she voted for Hale Boggs, who was white, over John Conyers, who was black, for majority leader. Boggs rewarded her with a place on the prized Education and Labor Committee and she was its third ranking member when she left.

In her book "Unbought and Unbossed," she recounted the campaign that brought her to Congress and wrote of her concerns about that body: "Our representative democracy is not working because the Congress that is supposed to represent the voters does not respond to their needs. I believe the chief reason for this is that it is ruled by a small group of old men."

Born Shirley St. Hill in New York City, on Nov. 30, 1924, she was the eldest of four daughters of Caribbean immigrants. She was married twice.

Former Va. governor now Richmond's mayor

BY MICHAEL GLENNON

The Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Former Virginia Gov. L. Douglas Wilder on Sunday took the oath of office to become Richmond's first popularly elected mayor in nearly six decades.

After being sworn in by his former law partner, 4th U.S. Circuit Court Judge Roger Gregory, Wilder said Richmond's residents are the city's greatest strength.

"Starting today," he said, "you, the people, are in charge of Richmond."

He urged citizens to help him build a model city for Virginia and not to forget the solid foundation Richmond already has.

Wilder, 73, said he hopes to give the people a "government that serves the people and not itself." Those who ignore his warning to end corruption, he

said, do so at their own peril.

Richmond cannot survive on its own, Wilder said, and asked for support from the communities surrounding the city. Wilder also said he wants an educational system that holds teachers, students and parents accountable.

He also urged Richmond residents to never accept poverty or crime as a natural state. All forms of crime, regardless of severity, he said, are unacceptable and must stop.

The grandson of slaves, Wilder became the first black person elected as a state governor, defeating Marshall Coleman in 1989.

Comedian Bill Cosby introduced his friend, saying, "It's cleanup time. You voted somebody into office who does not fool around."

In 2003, Wilder and former Republican U.S. Rep. Thomas Bliley successfully pushed for a city-wide referendum to scrap a form of government dominated by a city council that vests more power in a hired city manager than in a weak mayor chosen from among council members.

About 80 percent of Richmond's voters approved the change in the November 2003 election.



Wilder

Mistress writes book

FRESNO, Calif. — Scott Peterson's former mistress confesses in a book to be released this week that she "still thinks about Scott from time to time." She also confesses that "I sometimes wonder if he thinks about me."

The book by Amber Frey, "Witness for the Prosecution of Scott Peterson," is scheduled to be released Tuesday, but was mistakenly sold at a supermarket in the town of Modesto, where Peterson's wife, Laci, disappeared four years before her body was discovered in April 2003 along the San Francisco Bay shoreline.

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News and Editorial

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Sharon Owens, News Peter Pothoff, Photo/Graphics
Brian Owens, Features Sean Morris, Sports

Addresses

U.S. Mail: Unit 29480, APO 09211
International Mail: Postfach 1339, 64345 Griesheim,
Germany 64345
FAX: letters@starsandstripes.com (+44) (0) 6155/0416
E-MAIL: News, news@mail.starsandstripes.com
Letters: letters@mail.starsandstripes.com
CENTRAL OFFICE: 529 14th Street NW, Suite 350, Washington DC
20045-1301, Phone 202-312-763-0900 or fax (+1) (202)
202-312-763-0900
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR: David Mazzarella, 529 14th St. NW, Suite
350, Washington DC 20045-1301, Phone 202-312-763-0945 or
fax (+1) (202) 312-763-0945
E-mail: mazzarella@mail.starsandstripes.com
EMBASSY: Los Angeles, Send comments to: Ombudsman, Stars
and Stripes, 529 14th St. NW, Suite 350, Washington, DC
20045-1301, Phone: (202) 312-763-0932, fax
(+1) (202) 312-763-0936
or e-mail: ombudsman@mail.starsandstripes.com

How to call us

Editor: 529-4837, call (+44) (0) 6155/0416/237
FAX: 529-4838, call (+44) (0) 6155/0416/237
Sports: 529-4835, call (+44) (0) 6155/0416/235
Circulation: 529-4823, call (+44) (0) 6155/0416/437
FAX: 529-4835, call (+44) (0) 6155/0416/437
fax (+44) (0) 6155/0416/33543

News Bureaus

GERMANY (Quota code +49)
Bonnberg: Rick Emmet, 2700 5th St., Suite 2541, APO
09119-7535, tel: DSN 409-7567 or fax (+1) 202-312-763-0900
FAX: 529-4838, call (+44) (0) 6155/0416/237
E-mail: emmetr@mail.starsandstripes.com
Bamundheim: Terry Boyd, 222nd RSR, APO 09304, tel: DSN
409-7567, call (+44) (0) 6155/0416/237
E-mail: boyd@mail.starsandstripes.com
Bourne: Douglas Houghton, 29480, APO 09211, tel: DSN
348-6406 or fax (+1) 6155-0416
E-mail: doug@starsandstripes.com, Ward Sanderson, Unit
29480, APO 09211, tel: DSN 348-6406 or fax (+1) 6155-0416
E-mail: sanderson@mail.starsandstripes.com, and
Unit 29480, APO 09211, tel: DSN 348-6406 or fax (+1) 6155-0416
E-mail: inge@mail.starsandstripes.com
Heidelberg: Hans-Joachim R. Anderson, Room 117, Rostower 104,
69115 Heidelberg, Germany, tel: DSN 179-7100 or fax (+1) 622/60554
fax (+1) 622/23421, e-mail: anderson@mail.starsandstripes.com
Kaiserslautern/Spanham: Helmut 027-3717, tel: DSN
489-5385 or fax (+1) 631/52104 or fax (+1) 631/57140; fax (+1) 631/5089
E-mail: helmut@starsandstripes.com
Stuttgart: Charles Omer, CNR 432, Box 465, APO 09107-0465,
tel: DSN 432-2808 or fax (+1) 631-5717-29088, fax (+1) 631/5089
E-mail: omer@mail.starsandstripes.com
Würzburg: Steve Lerner, tel: DSN 359-5458 or fax (+1) 0931-467-7001,
fax (+1) 0931-700772, e-mail: lerner@mail.starsandstripes.com

ITALY

Abruzzo/Vicenza: Kent Harris, tel: DSN 6140 632-7652 or fax (+1) 631/436-7652, send (+1) 631-432-6222 or fax (+1) 631/436-4222, e-mail: harris@mail.starsandstripes.com
Naples: Sandra Davis and Jason Chubb, Box 56, FPO APO
09436, tel: DSN 626-5157 or fax (+1) 631/081 568-5157, fax
DSN 626-5159 or fax (+1) 631-568-5159, e-mail: sandra@mail.starsandstripes.com and jason@mail.starsandstripes.com

SPAIN

Rota: Scott Schumann, PSC 950, Box 1, FPO APO 09645, tel: DSN
727-1099 or fax (+1) (34) 0950 82-1099, fax DSN 727-1034 or
fax (+1) (34) 0950 82-1034

UNITED KINGDOM

RAF Mildenhall: Peter Jensen, tel: DSN 238-4688 or fax (+44) (0) 1639-044888, fax (+44) (0) 1639-7100/31,
e-mail: peter@mail.starsandstripes.com

WASHINGTON DC

Bureau editor: Patrick Dickson, 529 14th Street NW, Suite 350, Wash-
ington DC 20045-1301, tel: DSN 312-763-0900 or fax (+1) 202-312-763-0900
E-mail: dickson@mail.starsandstripes.com
Liaison: David Smith, tel: DSN 312-763-0932, fax (+1) 202-312-763-0932
14th Street NW, Suite 350, Washington DC 20045-1301, tel: DSN
312-763-0932, fax (+1) 202-312-763-0932, e-mail: smith@mail.starsandstripes.com and smith@mail.starsandstripes.com

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Troops seek better support

I am a squad leader in the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment currently sta-
tioned at Camp Cooke, Taji, Iraq. I am
writing in regard to an article published
in the Dec. 27 Midwest edition ("Chris-
tians patrol greeted by mud, firefight")
about our brothers on patrol on Christ-
mas Day.

This Christmas was certainly one to re-
member, it was our first Christmas in
Iraq. I am a good friend of Sgt. Andrew
Neason, who was in the Humvee that
flipped over and left him temporarily sub-
merged, and was part of the quick re-
covery force that escorted the M88 recovery
vehicle that recovered Neason's Humvee
from the canal. My letter regards events
that happened after we got back into
Camp Cooke and all tried to sit down and
enjoy Christmas dinner with our broth-
ers.

It was appalled to hear that Neason,
who nearly drowned in that canal, and
his crew were turned away or thrown out
of the dining facility due to their muddy
clothing and the close proximity to clos-
ing time. We only had less than 30 min-
utes to secure our sensitive items, give
a debrief and get dinner. It was Christ-
mas; we had all been outside "the wire" to
ensure that those who did not go out would
not be harassed or worse by mortar and
rocket fire from the insurgents. I am not
saying we need to get medals and super-
star accolades for what we did, but for
goodness sake let us eat and enjoy Chris-
tians dinner with our family here in Iraq.

This is not an isolated incident. Those
of us who conduct combat patrols on a
regular basis are constantly singled out
by those who do not for inconsequential
faults and petty infractions of insignifi-
cant rules. Perhaps if they put their lives
on the line on a daily basis as we do, they
might begin to understand our perspec-
tive. I do understand we are in the Army,
and the Army thrives on rules and regu-
lations, but there is a waiver for nearly ev-
erything. At the very least exercise some
discretion.

Sgt. Werner Tsin

Camp Cooke, Iraq

Give all woman infantry a try

For the last decade, I've read letters to
the editor about women in the infantry,
women Rangers and women in combat.
I've reached the conclusion that we need
an all-women infantry battalion. This
would allow for those women who wish
to serve in the same way as their broth-
ers to do so without threatening some
man's sexuality or emotional sensibility
out on the battlefield.

Not all women want to stay at home
and raise children and not all women
want to be in the infantry, just like many
men do not either. That is why you have a
choice when you join the Army. Let's
have special tryouts where women can

Tell us what you think

Stars and Stripes welcomes your comments on
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compete to be part of an all-woman infantry
battalion. If they make it, arm them
with the tools and training to take out ter-
rorists in an infantry capacity. This is not
a unique and novel idea, but rather one
that deserves to be given a chance in to-
day's Army.

I'm really concerned with how it
will look if the alleged weaker sex goes in
and starts kicking butt. It's all good,
we're on the same team and need to
focus on the common goal of defeating
terrorism. Don't let old-fashioned ideas
and repression bind 50 percent of Ameri-
ca's population — that sounds like the
Taliban. We speak about equal opportu-
nity and equal rights, but how do we per-
form when I see prevent women from fil-
ling in infantry jobs? Make me a general,
bring back the Women's Army Corps and
let's end this foolish sexist argument
once and for all.

Staff Sgt. Joyce Costello

Livorno, Italy

Motorcycle test unnecessary

As an infantry first sergeant, I under-
stand the issue of soldiers buying motor-
cycles for which they have had no train-
ing and little experience operating. This
is an issue, and it needs to be addressed.

What I am having trouble with is the
over-reaction concerning those with
years of experience riding (more than 30
myself). Some "smart guy" needs to fig-
ure out that one size does not fit all when
it comes to experience and abilities. I
have owned "crotch rockets" — high-per-
formance sportbike motorcycles — and
there is definitely a problem with these
amounts of horsepower in the hands of
someone with little training. However,
my current situation is radically differ-
ent. I have been riding since I was 7
years old, my current motorcycle will not
go above 70 mph and I simply do not un-
derstand the roadblocks being thrown up
in my path to enjoy an activity that my en-
tire family enjoys so much.

When I return to Germany I will be

going on block leave to the States, then re-
turning to Germany. Now I am being told
I have to take an additional Motorcycle
Safety Foundation course in order to
ride. This will take time away from ei-
ther my family or from my soldiers.
Time from my family that is simply irre-
placeable and uncalled for; from my sol-
diers, not wise.

There are many things I love about the
Army, but this is one issue that my wife
and I have discussed as the possible
straw that breaks the camel's back. After
having survived being shot at, nearly
being blown up multiple times and being
responsible for more than 300 soldiers, I
am being told that I am not responsible
enough to determine whether I am safe
enough to perform an activity I have
been performing since I was a child.

1st Sgt. Michael Abbey
Forward Operating Base
Brassfield-Mora, Iraq

The buck stops where?

Excuses, excuses, excuses. Bernard
Kerik's withdrawal as the president's
nominee to head the Department of
Homeland Security is just the latest of
many debacles stemming from the incom-
petent actions of President Bush. Of
course, Kerik withdrew his own name
himself and publicly apologized to Bush
(as well he should have), and Rudy
Giuliani was quick to do the same. How-
ever, both men stepped in to draw atten-
tion away from the real issue: Bush's habitual
poor judgment.

It's clear that "falling on the sword" to
protect this president is not only com-
mon, but necessary. Honest, competent
leaders are used just to cover up ac-
tivity when failure is theirs. Yes,
Kerik is responsible for his own wrongdo-
ing, but Bush is responsible for selecting
him in the first place. Are we really to be
blamed for no one within this adminis-
tration had the ability to check this guy out
a little better?

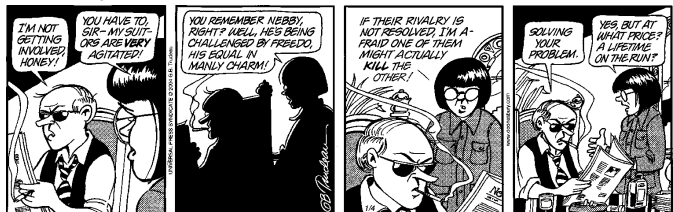
Applicants for the position of night shift
manager at Taco Bell probably have to
submit to a more rigorous background
check than did Kerik. Now, despite his
withdrawal, information continues to sur-
face about Kerik's rampant adultery and
political corruption, further underscoring
the extent of Bush's poor judgment.
The excuses run many and deep with
Bush. When Bush going to use good judg-
ment, and be man enough to accept re-
sponsibility when he does not? Only cov-
ards allow others to take the fall for them.
The excuses run many and deep with
Bush: Prisoner abuse? A few "bad ap-
ples." The Valerie Plame affair? One
"rogue" official. The Iraq mess? Every-
thing's fine! It's the media fault for not
getting the story right. Here are some
new concepts for Bush: Use better judg-
ment in the first place, and accept respon-
sibility when you're at fault. After all,
where does the buck stop, Mr. President?

Tim Mason

Camp Liberty, Iraq

By GARRY TRUDEAU

Doonesbury Flashbacks



OPINION

Check the files: 'Sharing' movies is stealing

BY EDWIN MEESE III

If John Adams and James Madison were alive today, they surely would marvel at how swiftly information can be exchanged via the Internet.

But they also would be alarmed, I believe, to see ordinary citizens using this extraordinary technology in growing numbers to shoplift copyrighted intellectual property. The Founders possessed, after all, a keen understanding of the threat this type of theft poses to a free society.

Property rights are not a novel concept. After some deliberation, our constitutional framers signaled how important it was to protect intellectual property by instilling the concept in our nation's charter in Article I, Section 8, with a provision authorizing Congress to "promote the progress of science and the useful arts."

So deeply did the framers, in their founding document, embrace the concept of "progress" advanced through devotion to intellectual labor, that they mention it 24 separate times in the Federalist Papers.

As John Adams warned, "The moment an idea is admitted into society that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence." I fear that moment has come.

If thousands of books were stolen from libraries in a single day, school and library officials would immediately put heavy-duty security systems into place. Department store owners, by the same token, would hardly sit still if thieves were making off with armfuls of expensive clothing and jewelry.

Yet many otherwise law-abiding citizens

appear to think there's nothing wrong with doing essentially the same thing when it comes to intellectual property — as if stealing isn't stealing if you can do it with a computer in the comfort of your home or office.

The truth is, there is no difference between shoplifting a DVD from a store and illegally downloading a copyrighted movie from KaZaa.

Stealing intellectual property is just as wrong as the theft of "real" property.

And the vast majority of people use so-called "peer-to-peer" file-sharing networks such as KaZaa, Morphine and Grokster to download music and movies illegally. An overwhelming percentage of the 500 million files being "shared" at any given time are copyright-protected and thus owned by someone else.

Despite all the warning advertisements and the movie trailers, as well as new legal methods to download music and movies (such as you find at iTunes or CinemaNow), wholesale piracy is still taking place. A whopping 4 million users still partake in this dirty little game every day. So what is the victimized industry to do?

The movie industry recently took a bold new step to change the "so what" attitudes of so many. By initiating lawsuits against individuals stealing movies online, as well as revving up their public persuasion campaign, movie studios are taking a stand and making the message crystal clear: Stealing is stealing, and it must stop.

The cultural and economic value of creative films is undeniable. Today, the copyright industries are among America's fastest and growing economic assets.



Video shops in Afghanistan — such as this one in Kabul — are doing brisk business on bootleg DVDs and CDs. Nineteenth-century U.S. President James Madison said that "government is instituted to protect property of every sort," but intellectual property is not sacred in the United States, either.

They account for more than 5 percent of our gross domestic product, pouring \$535 billion into the U.S. economy. The film industry alone provides 580,000 well-paying jobs.

But this awesome engine of economic growth is threatened by the explosive growth of high-tech petty theft. Smith Barney estimates that if something is not done, movie industry losses will exceed a whopping \$5.4 billion by 2005.

If James Madison was right — that "gov-

ernment is instituted to protect property of every sort," if this objective is "the end of government," and "that alone is a just government" which impartially secures to every man whatever is his own" — then these movie studios are just doing what any potential thief victim would do: They are protecting property that is rightfully theirs.

Edwin Meese III, a former U.S. attorney general, is the Ronald Reagan Distinguished Fellow in Public Policy at The Heritage Foundation and chairman of the Washington-based think tank's Center for Legal and Judicial Studies.

These stories show what Iraq can be with our help

The Iraq story has always had a personal dimension for this columnist.

Having covered the story since the first Gulf War, I've acquainted many Iraqi friends and acquaintances. Some are exiles, some have comfortable lives in the United States to return home to rebuild their country.

Some suffered under Saddam Hussein. Some have been murdered since his overthrow.

Whenever I think about the tall odds against creating a stable Iraq, their faces come to mind.

It's easy to get angry at gross administration mistakes that led to the current Iraq mess and played into the hands of Iraqi insurgents. But if the Bush administration fails to stabilize Iraq before drawing down U.S. troops, ordinary Iraqis will pay dearly.

Of course, a total U.S. debacle in Iraq would also destabilize the entire Middle East and give al-Qaida a bonanza. But when I think of why such a debacle must be prevented, my mind keeps turning to the Iraqis I've known.

I think of Sayid Abdul Majid al-Khoi, the son of a revered Shiite cleric. Khoi made a fateful choice to return to southern Iraq with American assistance at the beginning of the war. He wanted to act as a bridge between the Americans and the Shiite religious establishment.

He risked his life in the hope that he could help U.S. officials overcome Shiite distrust of their intentions.

Shortly after he arrived in Najaf, he was killed to death by followers of a radical Shiite cleric who opposed the U.S. intervention. Did Khoi die in vain, or do his hopes for an Iraq that openly tolerates all branches of

Islam as well as other religions still stand a chance?

I think of Faeed Yasseen, son of a senior Iraqi diplomat who defected after Saddam came to power. Yasseen grew up in Europe, graduated from MIT, and spent years working on Iraqi human-rights issues. He left a comfortable life in Cambridge, Mass., to return to Baghdad and work with Sunni moderate politician Adnan Pachachi.

Now in the foreign ministry, Yasseen has had relatives murdered and mutilated in recent months, a friend kidnapped, and has escaped from car bombs. But he stays on.

I think of Shihab Hamdan, a young Shiite professor of English literature from the Baghdad suburb now known as Sadr City, who wears full religious headgear and long robe. Backed by her brothers, who were imprisoned under Saddam, she was brave enough to become a member of a district council appointed by the Americans to represent her neighborhood.

I also think of Riyadh Nassir al-Adhadh, a physician from one of the most anti-American Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad, who was chosen to sit in the Baghdad City Council set up by U.S. officials. Although he opposed the invasion, he decided he wanted to work from the inside to change his country — and to end the U.S. occupation. His reputation for helping the poor is such that Sunni insurgents haven't attacked him — last I heard.

I think of Hanna Edwar, who is running a nongovernmental agency, Al-Anfal, to help Iraqi women. She organized a national women's conference in June (with U.S. financial aid) in the hopes that Iraqis could learn the meaning of "civil society," the concept that grassroots efforts outside state control are essential counterweights to centralized power.

And I think of my translator, S. I use his initial because the current situation for Christians in Iraq is so dire he wouldn't

want his name used. He wrote recently that "the situation in Baghdad is getting worse by the day for us Christians. We are so vulnerable with all these churches (sic) bombings."

"In Mosul, Islamic clerics on Friday preach advice not to buy houses from Christians because they will leave and we will have it for free." He also wrote of threats during Ramadan "that any women without veil will be sprayed with acid regardless of religion."

S. continues to translate for foreigners because he wants to work.

It's hard to be optimistic about Iraq's future right now. The Iraqis I know are mostly among the minority who are willing to risk their lives to try to build a decent Iraq. I know their task is uphill. Yet, given their courage, I have to hope that mistakes by the U.S. can be repaired, at least enough to give these Iraqis a decent hope of normal lives.

Trudy Rubin is a columnist and editorial-board member for The Philadelphia Inquirer.

Trudy Rubin



Mallard Fillmore



T.V. EXECUTIVES:
"WE RESOLVE TO
RELIVE ALL OUR
CHILDHOODS..."

WITH PROGRAMS
THAT WE
THINK ARE
COOL..."



"...WITH SCRIPTS
THAT ABOUT..."

"...WITH STUFF ONCE
ONLY FOUND..."

"...ON THE BATHROOM
WALLS IN
MIDDLE SCHOOL..."

BY BRUCE TINSLEY

Politics, charity put bloggers on top in '04

Survey finds growing readership of online journals, especially when it comes to news

BY ANICK JESDANUN

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Readership of online journals known as blogs grew significantly in 2004, driven by increased awareness of them during the presidential campaign and other major news events, according to a study released Sunday.

Twenty-seven percent of online adults in the United States said in November they read blogs, compared with 17 percent in a February survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Blogs that cover the tsunami disaster and relief efforts were found to boost readership further, said Lee Rainie, the project's director.

"The tsunami is one of those cataclysmic news moments where lots of people's perceptions change," Rainie said. "Awareness of blogs will grow dramatically. There's so

much attention to the coverage on blogs and Web sites and first-person view as primary news sources.

In the past week, blogs have shared information on giving money and finding missing family members, and several posted first-person narratives and photos from the affected areas. The web of links that are fundamental to blogs made it possible to quickly disseminate information that otherwise may have remained obscure.

Earlier in the year, politics was what drove readers to blogs.

Democrat Howard Dean embraced blogs early, allowing supporters from around the country to organize and talk about the campaign informally, without needing to clear remarks with campaign headquarters. Many bloggers who supported his campaign provided links for readers to easily make campaign contributions over the Internet.

Even after Dean's campaign fizzled, bloggers continued to pundit, and a handful were invited to cover the Democratic and Republican national conventions for the first time.

Time magazine even named its first Blog of the Year, crediting the Power Line Blog created by three lawyers for challenging mainstream media and questioning the validity of documents behind a "60 Minutes" report on President Bush's National Guard service.

CBS News anchor Dan Rather later apologized for airing the report.

"Blogs have been around for several years, but because of the coverage in the political campaign, a lot more people became aware of the idea of blogging and certainly went online to read blogs," Rainie said.

Though blog readership jumped, the per-

centage of online Americans who write blogs grew only slightly — to 7 percent in November, up from 5 percent early in the year. Blog creators tend to be male, affluent, well-educated and young; 70 percent of them have high-speed connections at home, and 82 percent have been online at least six years.

Despite the attention to blogging, a large number of Americans remain clueless — only 38 percent of Internet users know what a blog is, online agglomerations of ideas, information and links, usually presented with the most recent postings on top, and often offering a mechanism for visitors to post comments.

The survey, based on random telephone calls with 1,861 Internet users conducted Nov. 4-30, has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. The RSS question was based on a smaller sample of 537 Internet users and has an error margin of 4 percentage points.

James Denney, director of product marketing for TiVo, demonstrates the new TiVoGo feature at the company's headquarters in Alviso, Calif., last month. The upgrade will enable users to transfer their favorite programs from their television to their computers.

AP



TiVo introduces 'to go' service

BY MAY WONG

The Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — TiVo Inc. pioneered digital video recording as a new way of watching television — when you want it.

Now it could be on TV where you want it, too. The long-awaited service feature called TiVoGo, set to launch Monday, will give users their first taste of TiVo unleashed.

No longer confined to TiVo digital video recorders in the living room or bedroom, subscribers will be able to transfer their recorded shows to PCs or laptops and take them on the road — as long as the shows are not specially tagged with copy restrictions.

Users also will be able to copy shows onto a DVD soon after — but not immediately — at the service launch, company officials said.

The mobile feature is a key step in TiVo's long-term vision of giving consumers more freedom with how and where they enjoy their favorite TV. TiVo plans to extend TiVoGo so it will work on other portable media gadgets as well.

The company, based in the south San Francisco Bay community of Alviso, eventually hopes to expand its service so video can be accessed anywhere via the Internet.

"It lays the foundation of moving content out of the living room," TiVo spokeswoman Kathryn Kelly said.

For now, the feature sets TiVo apart from its growing list of competitors, such as cable operators that are introducing digital video recording features into their set-top-boxes.

"Right now, TiVo is trying to build a culture of letting consumers move their content around the home and beyond, and as long as they're doing it within the copyright concerns, it's a good idea," said Vamsi Sista, analyst with market researcher ABI Research.

Digital video recorders allow viewers to record TV shows onto hard disks, fast-forward through commercials and pause live broadcasts.

TiVoGo will be an automatic, free service upgrade for subscribers who own stand-alone Series2 TiVo DVRs. It will not work for subscribers owning DirecTV TiVo satellite boxes. Also, the technology will work only with computers based on Microsoft Corp.'s Windows XP or 2000 operating systems, although a version for Macintosh computers is planned, TiVo officials said.

The recorded shows are transferred to PCs or laptops via a home computer network. A media access code and password is assigned to each user's account, essentially restricting the transfer and playback of shows to household members with the same access code.

TiVo officials have tried to strike a balance between what they consider consumers' rights and Hollywood's copyright concerns. They say the video files being transferred are encrypted and need the corresponding media access code for playback.

Users try to e-mail the files to others or host the files over the Internet, their accounts could be revoked, Kelly said.

"We're trying to send a clear message that TiVo is not for personal use only," said Jim Penney, director of product marketing at TiVo. "And we're putting appropriate safeguards in place to keep people from rampantly sharing the content."

Organizers hoping for a secure and festive inaugural celebration

BY KATHERINE M. SKIBA

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

MILWAUKEE — President Bush's recitation of the 35-word oath on Jan. 20 will be the centerpiece of four days of pageantry, prayer and party-going.

The 55th inauguration, given the twin themes "Celebrating Freedom, Honoring Service," has thousands at work on what may be the costliest such extravaganza ever.

"We know the world will be watching," said Dallas businesswoman Jeanne Johnson Phillips, chairman of the 55th Presidential Inaugural Committee.

Noting that inaugurations date to April 30, 1789, when George Washington was sworn in in New York City, Phillips said they are one of the country's greatest traditions — "a time when our nation stands together regardless of politics to embrace a new period of the life of our nation."

The twin themes were chosen to celebrate freedoms here and promote the goal of "freedom everywhere for everyone," while showing gratitude to the U.S. Armed Forces serving abroad, Phillips said.

This year's festivities will feature nine official balls, one of them free to members of the military and their families, as well as candlelight dinners featuring the president, the first lady, the vice president and his wife, plus the traditional parade and a lengthy lineup of events.

Official events begin Jan. 18 and conclude the day after the inaugural with a prayer service at the Washington National Cathedral.

Committee spokesman Kevin Sheridan said inaugural planners hope to raise \$40 million, though some press accounts put the figure higher.

He said the inauguration promises to be inclusive, open, positive and spiritual.

Count on exclusivity, too, since special packages of tickets are being made available to those who donate \$250,000 (the "underwriter" package) and \$100,000 (the "sponsor" package).

Donations to the inaugural are being capped at a quarter-million dollars, and contributors are being capped at the official Web site, www.inauguration05.com, Sheridan said.

As the political establishment — plus hoteliers, party planners and tuxedo shops — prepares for the quadrennial onslaught of out-of-towners, several protest groups are planning to make their anti-administration views known.

Sheridan, of the inaugural committee, said the organization is not concerned about protesters disrupting official events.

"This is not a hyper-partisan event," he said, "but people are very willing to express their opinions, one way or another."

The Secret Service will lead approximately 40 agencies in providing security, spokesman Tom Mazur said. He declined to divulge safety measures, saying more would be made public as the event draws closer.

"Our hope is that the significance of the event, and the celebration of our democracy, is highlighted, and security is not the story," he said.

"We know the world will be watching"

Jeanne Johnson Phillips
Presidential Inaugural Committee



Motorists travel on a snow-covered I-80 near Cisco Grove, Calif., on Sunday.

More snow in forecast for Calif.

The Associated Press

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. — Forecasters predicted more snow in the Sierra Nevada on Monday, a day after holiday revelers returning home from mountain getaways ran into traffic delays and slippery highways.

Winter storm and snow advisories remained in effect for the region, where some ski resorts in the Lake Tahoe area reported as much as 9 feet of snow at their peaks since late last week.

Stormy weather had arrived in northern California about a week ago.

"We're looking at several shots of energy dropping around here, keeping us in a showery pattern for the next couple of days, then this system will continue dropping south and begin to affect Southern California more," said Karl Swanberg, a forecaster with the National Weather Service in Sacramento.

The weather service said up to a foot more snow was possible in the northern Sierra.

Rovers still going strong on Mars

Explorations let scientists see Red Planet in new light

BY JEREMY MANIER

Chicago Tribune

CHICAGO — As NASA's twin robotic rovers arrived at Mars one year ago, the planet that awaited them looked to many scientists like a vast, inert museum, where water and warmth gave way long ago to a cold and seemingly dead world.

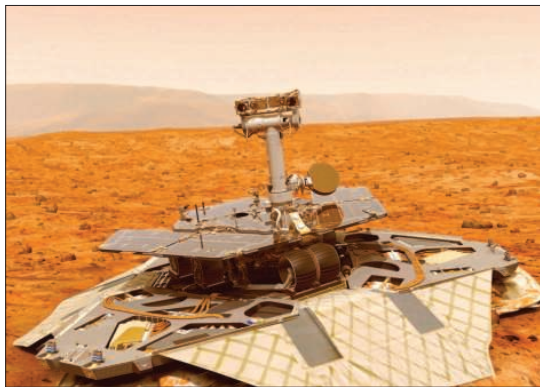
That picture has shifted dramatically in a short time, experts say, thanks to findings from the rovers and other research efforts that suggest Mars remains a geologically dynamic planet with tantalizing hints of life.

The new Mars is an untamed place with possibly active volcanoes and geothermal springs, dry sea beds, recent glacier activity and traces of methane in its atmosphere. That last fact may prove the most intriguing, scientists say, because the mysterious methane could be coming from living Martian microbes.

"Mars is not the same world in our minds today that it was one year ago," said Jeffrey Kargel, a researcher in astrogeology with the U.S. Geological Survey in Flagstaff, Ariz.

At the forefront of the revolution are the rovers Opportunity and Spirit, both of which have survived longer than their designers' wildest hopes, and are still charting new ground one year after landing on opposite sides of the planet. Last March, Opportunity found bedrock containing the first tangible evidence that Mars once had shallow, salty seas — a discovery Science magazine dubbed its "Breakthrough of the Year."

Evidence for recent glaciers and volcanic activity, published Dec. 23 in the journal Nature,



CORNELL UNIVERSITY/AP

In this photo released by WGBH-TV Boston, in November 2004, a Mars rover is shown before deploying. The rover is one of two that landed on Mars as part of the Mars Exploration Rover project.

came from the European probe Mars Express, which has taken detailed photos of huge swaths of the Martian surface.

The orbiter found relatively young lava flows in the craters of several Martian volcanoes, including Olympus Mons, the biggest volcano in the solar system at 15 miles high.

Scientists analyzing the Mars Express photos found a few meteorite-impact craters in several of the lava fields — a sign the features formed within the last 2 million years or so.

"If you see evidence for activity from a couple million years ago, that means the planet is geologically alive today," said James Head, a professor of planetary science at Brown University and a co-author on the Mars Express study.

The new results already are spurring ideas for future unmanned missions. Head said one target could be the rocky mounds and ridges left by glaciers in the Martian tropics, where probes could find ice close to the surface.

Searching for sources of methane might require small airplanes or balloons to sample the atmosphere around the planet, said Steven Squyres, leader of the science team for the Mars rovers. Microbes such as bacteria are just one possible explanation for the methane detected this year by three separate teams using space- and earth-based instruments. Other possible sources include geothermal vents, ordinary hydrogen reactions or natural gas akin to the deposits on earth, which stem from ancient biological material.

"Five or 10 years from now, the

methane could end up being the most profound discovery from this year," said Kargel of the U.S. Geological Service. "It could be life thriving right now in the subsurface."

If life survives on Mars today, Opportunity's observations may give hints of the habitats where it can be found. The bedrock sediments in the small crater where Opportunity came to rest formed in shallow water that was salty and about as acidic as tomato juice, experts believe.

The Martian atmosphere today is so thin that liquid water would quickly boil away into vapor. Some stable marshes or ponds could exist, Kargel said, but to stay liquid they would have to be extremely salty and nearly as acidic as sulfuric acid — too hostile for even the toughest microbes on Earth, but maybe not for life that evolved on Mars.

Agricultural studies drawing city kids

BY JOHN SEEWER

The Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio — Inside a greenhouse here, high school students studying hydroponics are growing lettuce and basil without soil.

In Philadelphia, teenagers tend to a herd of cows. And in Minneapolis, students are researching how grass grows in different kinds of soil.

An increasing number of students in cities and suburbs are taking agriculture classes and considering careers in the industry even at a time when the number of farms is declining.

"We're not trying to teach cows, sows and plows," said Thomas Scott, principal at Saul High School for Agricultural Sciences in Philadelphia. "What we're really trying to do is teach skills so that they can apply them to science or any field they want to go into."

The National FFA Organization, formerly Future Farmers of America, says its membership of 476,000 students is the highest in 22 years.

Much of the growth has come in urban schools, said spokesman Bill Stagg. The organization has programs in 11 of the nation's 15 biggest cities.

What the students are learning, though, isn't traditional farming.

It's horticulture and landscaping. And it's fixing machinery and taking care of small animals. Students at Washington Park Horticulture Center in Cleveland grow poinsettias in the summer and fall and make floral arrangements for their annual holiday sale.

"We're teaching them about the science, business and technology of agriculture," said Becky Meyer, director of the Agricultural and Food Sciences Academy in Little Canada, Minn.

One in five jobs in Minnesota can be tied to agriculture, she said. "There's a need for people who are agriculture literate."

The charter school, now in its fourth year, has grown from 12 students to 160. A new building will help double its size in the next three years, Meyer said.

Meanwhile, the number of farms has continued to shrink. There were about 2.1 million farms in 2002 — 87,000 fewer than in 1997, according to the latest census figures from the Agriculture Department.

One of the biggest challenges for agriculture educators is persuading students to take the classes.

But once students start learning about careers in agriculture, they realize they might want to be a commodities trader, veterinarian or florist, said Levon Esters, who taught agriculture-business for three years in Chicago.

"Show me the money," he said. "That's what it comes down to for kids."



Robert Ruffin, 14, waters the poinsettias last month at the Washington Park Agriculture Career Center in Cleveland.

Gambling on resort

PA HARRISBURG — A Scranton businessman with close ties to a Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board member has purchased a once-famous 600-room resort in the Poconos for \$25.1 million, fueling speculation he may seek a slot-machine casino license.

The sale of the Mount Airy Lodge in Mount Pocono was recorded in the Monroe County Courthouse more than three years after it ceased operations. The buyer was a corporation headed by Louis A. DeNaples, whose enterprises include a large auto-parts store, a landfill and vast real-estate holdings.

DeNaples is a former client of Scranton lawyer William P. Conaboy, a health care executive appointed to the gambling commission by state Senate Democratic leader Robert J. Mellow, whom Conaboy once served as an aide.

Through a Gaming Control Board spokesman, Conaboy describes DeNaples as a "friend" and said he would disclose any relevant details of their relationship if DeNaples pursues a slots license.

House collapse kills man

TX AUSTIN — A man who died when a house collapsed during renovations has been identified.

Authorities said Francisco Javier Aguilar, 35, of San Antonio, died in the accident. Aguilar, a construction worker, was trapped underneath the 100-year-old home he was helping to renovate. Witnesses said the two-story house had been lifted off the ground and was resting on cinder blocks when it collapsed.

Austin police and the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration are investigating.

The construction company, Austin House Leveling & Soil Stabilization Inc., said the collapse was the first of its kind in its history, and it is working with OSHA to determine the cause.

36 hurt at sledding party

ND MINOT — Thirty-six children were injured in a sledding accident during an all-night New Year's Eve party hosted by a religious organization.

Three of the children were hospitalized, but all were in stable condition, hospital officials said. The others were treated and released.

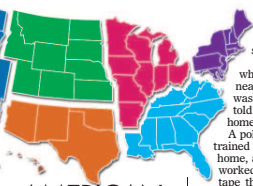
Police Sgt. Winston Black said more than 100 children ages 12 to 19 attending a Youth for Christ event gathered at a high school around 4 a.m. to slide down a hill using sleds built out of cardboard boxes.

A sign posted on the hill prohibited sledding.

The children and Youth for Christ staff piled eight to 12 passengers on the sleds, then went down the hill in quick succession, Black said. "The sleds struck rocks, a light pole and each other," he said.

Company closes stores

MA BRAINTREE — J.L. Hammett Co., the country's oldest school-supply company, whose founder invented the blackboard eraser — is closing its 52 retail stores nationwide after 141 years.



AMERICAN ROUNDUP

The Braintree-based company will continue to sell merchandise on its Web site, The Patriot Ledger of Quincy reported.

Construction accident

TX HOUSTON — A highway construction worker was flown to a hospital after a piece of rebar fell about 40 feet and pierced his face.

Officials said the ridge piece of a steel bar impaled the unidentified worker on the Katy Freeway construction project in west Houston. He was airlifted to Memorial Hermann Hospital. His condition was not known.

Home invasion foiled

OH UPPER ARLINGTON — Two men accused of invading a couple's home and forcing an elderly man to withdraw \$10,000 from his bank were arrested after tellers noticed a bruise on the 73-year-old man's forehead and alerted police.

Two men entered the home of John and Judith Hansel in a Columbus suburb, said police spokesman Officer Don Stanko.

According to police reports, Robert E. Jackson, 23, forced John Hansel to drive his car to a bank while Michael Lathon, 19, stayed with Judith Hansel, 66. Jackson allegedly ordered Hansel to with-

draw the money, but suspicious tellers called police, Stanko said.

Police chased the car, which Jackson crashed nearby, Stanko said. He was arrested and Hansel told officers his wife was at home with a bruise.

A police SWAT team sent a trained dog into the couple's home, and Judith Hansel had worked free from the duct tape that bound her and escaped, Stanko said. Lathon surrendered, police said.

Club fights fine

GA ATLANTA — A country club sued the city after it was fined for refusing to extend spousal benefits to the partners of two gay members.

A lawsuit filed by Druid Hills Golf Club seeks to block a \$500-per-day fine ordered by Mayor Shirley Franklin until the club grants the benefits.

It also asks a judge to throw out the city's human rights ordinance, which requires businesses to treat people registered in the city as domestic partners as married couples. Franklin said the club violated the ordinance by refusing to extend spousal benefits, including golf privileges, to two gay members.

Too warm for Rudolph?

WA SEATTLE — If global warming continues, some reindeer may go down in history — and even come back.

An archaeologist at the University of Washington, Donald Grayson, believes those reindeer, or caribou as they're also known in North America, could disappear from the southern borders of their habitat.

On this continent, that could spell the end for herds roaming mountains in Washington, Idaho, southern British Columbia and Alberta.

The woodland caribou, which lives in the mountains in small herds, is considered the most endangered large mammal in the lower 48 states and can be found only in the Selkirk Mountains in northeastern Washington and northern Idaho.

Teacher gets 100 years

TX PARIS — A retired teacher offered a five-year plea bargain in a sexual misconduct case instead received a 100-year prison sentence after a new district attorney frowned on the deal and asked a jury for the maximum penalty.

Scott received 20 years each on three counts of inducing a child younger than 18 to engage in sexual conduct, 10 years on each of three counts of producing or promoting a videotape involving sexual conduct, and 10 years on each of three counts of possession of child pornography.

The jury recommended the maximum sentence that County Attorney Gary Young asked it to deliver.

Young defeated former prosecutor Mark Burtner in the Democratic Party primary earlier this year. When Burtner chose to resign and take a job in El Paso in August, four months before the end of his term, county commissioners appointed Young to take office immediately.

Upon learning of the plea bargain offer in Scott's case, Young saw that it had not yet been responded to and took it off the table, spokesman Allan Hubbard said.



Hungry fowl

Brandon Williams, 3, of Alliance, Ohio, feeds the ducks at the Broadway Wharf in East Liverpool, Ohio, while visiting his grandparents for the holidays.



Frozen reflection

LaC La Belle in Oconomowoc, Wis.

A melting ice cover mirrors Adam Both as he secures an ice boat on



Photo hijinx

Joey, 3, and Delanie Donovan, 8, of Carlisle, Iowa, pose as the famous couple in the "American Gothic" painting while visiting the State Historical Building in downtown Des Moines, Iowa.



Squirrel heads out for a run

A squirrel jumps through fresh snow in a Great Falls, Mont., yard.



Field of fire

Hay at a Vado, N.M., dairy that had caught fire continues to burn as the sun sets. No injuries were reported and the cause of the fire had not been determined.



Historic run

Despite the rain, Robert Kraft, shirtless, ends 2004 with a run on the sands of Miami Beach. Kraft, 53, by his own account, has run eight miles on the same stretch of beach every day at the same time for the past 30 years without missing a day. Kraft, who is also known as "The Raven," started his running streak on Jan. 1, 1975.

Rally against police

FL JACKSONVILLE — About 200 people chanting "No justice, no peace" marched through the city to protest the deaths of two black men in police custody.

At a rally on the steps of the Jacksonville sheriff's office, U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown, civil rights leaders and ministers called for the creation of a citizens review board to look into police brutality.

A white police officer has resigned since the death of one of the men, Sammie Lee Evans, 49, whose neck was broken as police tried to arrest him on Dec. 3 for possession of an open container of alcohol outside his home.

Diversity shortfalls

MA BOSTON — Most Massachusetts cities and towns ordered to diversify their police and fire departments in the 1970s have met their racial hiring goals, but 17 police and fire departments in 12 cities and towns have not.

Chelsea, Lawrence and Holyoke, with black and Hispanic populations ranging from 45 percent to 65 percent, have police and fire departments that are only about 20 percent minority, making them the furthest from reaching their goals of "parity" with their cities' minority populations, according to a Boston Sunday Globe analysis.

Fire departments in Cambridge and Newton, and police departments in New Bedford and Winthrop, have reached racial parity, but are still abiding by the consent decrees and hiring based on race.

Divorce refused

WA SPOKANE — A judge has refused to grant a divorce to a pregnant woman trying to leave her husband two years after he was jailed for beating her, ruling instead that she must wait until the child is born.

Shawna Hughes' husband was convicted of abuse in 2002. She separated from him after the attack and filed for divorce last April. She later became pregnant by another man and is due in March.

Her husband, Carlos, never contested the divorce, and the court commissioner approved it in October. But the divorce papers failed to note that Hughes was pregnant, and when the judge found out, he rescinded the divorce.

"There's a lot of case law that says it is important in this state that children not be illegitimized," Superior Court Judge Paul Bastine told The Spokesman-Review newspaper.

Hughes' attorney, Terri Sloyer, said nothing in state law says a pregnant woman cannot get a divorce.

Under Washington state law, a husband is presumed to be the father of any child born within 300 days of a divorce. The judge argued that the paternity of the child needs to be determined before a divorce can be finalized.

Double shooting in dorm

TX RICHMOND — An employee at a state school for the developmentally disabled shot a female co-worker, then killed himself, authorities said.

The woman, who was shot several times in a dormitory at the Richmond State School, was expected to survive, said Chief Deputy Craig

Brady of the Fort Bend County Sheriff's Department.

Neither employee was identified, and no one else was injured.

Endangered no more?

VT WATERBURY — Population growth among species has prompted state officials to consider removing ospreys, loons and peregrine falcons from Vermont's list of threatened and endangered species.

Meanwhile, black terns, upland sandpipers and two snakes — the eastern rat snake and the eastern racer — may be added to the lists after a public hearing set for later this month.

The need for revisions to the list "shows we have a conservation program that was a success and we should be celebrating that," said Craig McLaughlin, director of wildlife for the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.

Bat victim makes history

WI WAUWATOSA — A teenager who became the first person known to survive rabies without a vaccination has gone home after nearly 11 weeks in the hospital, officials said.

Jenna Giese, 15, was infected when a bat bit her at church in September but she did not immediately seek treatment. She began showing symptoms of rabies in mid-October.

A team of physicians at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin gambled on an experimental treatment and induced a coma as part of efforts to stave off the usually fatal infection.

Program trimming fat

PA EMMAUS — Despite some early mistakes that drew criticism and national attention, a school district effort to fight childhood obesity has shown promising results in its first few years, the district said.

The East Penn School District in Emmaus said its campaign — which includes confidential letters to parents, healthier vending machine fare and walking clubs — helped achieve an 18 percent drop in the number of overweight students and a 50 percent drop in the number of overweight students in the past school year.

Casino rush

NY MONTICELLO — Since weeds started sprouting around the boarded-up Borscht Belt hotels, some locals have looked to casinos to fill the void. A state plan approved in 2001 allowed up to three Indian casinos in hopes of attracting a new breed of tourists playing craps instead of canasta.

Now suddenly — after maneuvering by the Pataki administration — locals are looking at up to five casinos in this townsworn corner of the Catskills.

Under deals that would settle long-standing land claims, New York's Cayugas want to build at the Monticello Raceway and the Seneca-Cayugas of Oklahoma want to build at the site of the Concord, a big, shuttered Borscht Belt hotel. Also possible is a casino at Kutch's hotel involving the Mohawks of northern New York. All the proposals require state and federal approval.

Stories and photos from wire services

FACES



Singer Ashanti has done her best to stay above the fray as feuding between collaborator Ja Rule and rapper 50 Cent has caused waves throughout the music business. Her latest album, "Concrete Rose," recently was released and fans have responded positively.

Taking the HIGH ROAD

Avoiding the trap of a public hip-hop feud, Ashanti climbing charts again with new release

BY NEKESA MUMBI MOODY

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Ashanti just keeps flourishing amid the flames.

In 2002, while her labelmate and frequent collaborator Ja Rule was floundering due to a bitter battle with 50 Cent, the R&B songstress released her blockbuster sophomore album.

Now, with the recent release of her third album, "Concrete Rose," there are heaps of problems at her high-profile record label, The Inc. Both the label and its founder, Irv Gotti, are facing a criminal investigation, and there have been arrests in connection with the probe.

But none of it has adversely affected Ashanti's popularity or marketability. She currently has a top 10 hit, "Wonderful," with Ja Rule and R. Kelly. Her album's first single, the rock-tinged "Only U," is rising on the charts. She's been tapped by Herbal Essences to be their pitchwoman. And she's segueing into Hollywood with "Coach Carter," due in U.S. theaters in this month, and a Muppet movie — about as wholesome as it gets.

Maybe she's managed to dodge the negativity because of her girl-next-door charm and her infectious smile. She showed it frequently during a recent interview as she laughed off criticisms, gossip and questions about her love life.

AP: When you look back on your first album, how do you think you've grown?

Ashanti: There's definitely been growth. In every aspect — lyrically, vocally, performances. With the first album, although I had a lot of input, it was always up to Gotti. And with this one, we both have to compromise (laughs). [But I] absolutely trust Gotti. He's obviously been in the game longer, way longer.

AP: Ja Rule has suffered from a lot of criticism

for more than a year, and 50 Cent and his clique even targeted you in his feud with Ja. Were you worried that it would affect your career?

Ashanti: I kind of got pulled into some of the negativity going on. As far as it affecting me, obviously, as a person, I'm like, "What? I'm a girl! I don't have nothing to do with this." But other than that, I'm like, "I'm gonna do me. I held it down for my big brothers, and that was that."

AP: Did you wanna jump into the fray, or did you want to keep your head down low?

Ashanti: Well, there were a few times, when they kind of had to [say], "Listen, you're not a dude! You can't say that and you can't go and do nothin! You're five feet! Shut up!"

Certain things will get under your skin especially when you know that it's wrong, and you know that you have nothing to do with it, and you know you're innocent. So yeah, there were times when I was putting my big coat on, and my Timberlands (laughs). But you've gotta take it with a grain of salt. It's part of the territory, and you can't let other people change who you are as a person.

AP: Are you worried at all about the future of The Inc. or Gotti?

Ashanti: I'll just say I don't want anything negative to happen. The guys are too good, everyone's heart is too good for any negative stuff to happen.

AP: How did you get into acting?

Ashanti: It's something that I wanted to experience just to know if I would like it or not. I did a couple of school plays in high school, and my drama teacher would always give me kudos and said that I should pursue it. It wasn't heavy on my mind when I got into the industry, like, "I have to do a movie, I have to act." It was kind of something where I said later on, if the opportunities present itself, I'd wanna try it.

'Open Water' different in real life

Married filmmakers Chris Kentis and Laura Lau escaped being pulled into a real-life version of their thriller "Open Water" when the resort island of Phuket in Thailand was struck by last weekend's tsunami.

"I heard people yelling, 'Run, run!'" said Kentis, who wrote and directed the 2003 sleeper hit about two scuba divers stranded in shark-infested waters. "I looked behind me and I thought, 'This is what happens in a movie when there's a tidal wave.' You could hear the rumbling and this wave was coming right at us."

Kentis, 41, told The Associated Press by phone Thursday from Singapore that he fled to his upper-story hotel room, where he found his sister-in-law and other relatives.

But at that moment, his wife and 7-year-old daughter, Sabrina, were in a second-floor Internet cafe, trapped by a power booth lodged in the stairwell. The power went out and electric lines popped all around them.

"Open Water" was released Tuesday on DVD, but Kentis said that was the last thing on his mind.

"In the wake of all this, it's meaningless to me," he said.

Tribe buying out Trump casino

The Twenty Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians is buying out Donald Trump out of its casino in Coachella, Calif.

The tribe has announced an early \$6 million buyout of its partnership with Trump Hotels and Casino Resorts Inc. The initial \$11 million deal two years ago named the tribe's Spotlight 29 Casino the Trump 29 Casino. Daily operations were turned over to Trump's company as part of a \$60 million expansion.

The buyout announcement comes after Trump Hotels filed for bankruptcy last month. A bankruptcy judge this month signed off on a \$100 million loan that will keep Trump's casinos in New Jersey and Indiana open while the bankruptcy case is resolved.

The tribe's contract with Trump's Atlantic City, N.J., corporation would have expired in 2007, but included an early option to begin in April 2005.

Johnny Damon, girlfriend get hitched

Red Sox center fielder Johnny Damon, still sporting his trademark long locks, married Michelle Mangan in a ceremony in Florida last week.

The bride wore an ivory Vera Wang gown with a chapel-length train and long veil; the groom was dressed in a tux and silver tie.

AP/DC lead singer Brian Johnson, celebrity chef Todd English and Damon's Red Sox teammates Doug Mientkiewicz, Mike Timlin, Kevin Millar, Bronson Arroyo and Kevin Youkilis were among the 175 guests who attended the ceremony Thursday at Orlando's Ritz Carlton Grande Lakes Hotel.



Kentis



Mangan and Damon

It was the second marriage for the 31-year-old Damon, whose 5-year-old twins, Madelyn and Jackson, served as flower girl and ring bearer.

Queen issues New Year's honors

A rocker, an astronaut and the inventor of the automatic teller machine were honored by Queen Elizabeth II in the New Year's honors list.

Roger Daltrey of The Who and British-born U.S. astronaut Michael Foale were named Commanders of the Order of the British Empire, or CBE, Friday in the annual accolades for achievement in society, business, culture and sports.

Daltrey, 60, received his CBE for services to music, the entertainment industry and charity.

"I am so pleased. It is really great to be honored by my country," said Daltrey, who also is a patron of the Teenage Cancer Trust.

Foale, who became the first Briton to walk in space in 1995 and completed a six-month stint on the international space station in April, was awarded his CBE for services to space exploration.

John Shepherd-Barron, who installed the world's first automatic cash dispenser at a London bank in 1967, was named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire, or OBE, for services to banking.

The honors are bestowed by the queen, but she chooses only a few. Most recipients are selected by committees of civil servants from nominations made by the government and the public.



Foale

Horoscope

Mercury and Pluto join up for a little mischief, and it's the planetary equivalent to someone jumping out and yelling "Boo!" It's startling, not that funny and yet enlightening when taken to an introspective and philosophical level. What were you really afraid of for that split second? Perhaps some skeletons in your closet are ready to be buried.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY

(January 4). You crank out the accomplishments this year. It's like you're a receiver for positive financial energy. Career moves continue to be fortuitous as long as you're truly happy in your position. March is about asking for and receiving the respect and love you deserve. Never exchanging a word but sharing an intense moment.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). If you're open to it, a super-interesting chance meeting sparkles up your day. This could come in the form of strangers gazing at one another through a shop window, never exchanging a word but sharing an intense moment.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). When there's a chance to put your talent on the line for all to judge, you have no fear. As long as you're willing to risk rejection, you'll probably come away proud. Echoes of "How about that?" will be heard all up and down the land.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). You can't help but get engrossed in someone else's weird fortune. Could this preposterous turn of events ever happen to someone as savvy as you? Not likely — and there's something comforting in that fact.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). In a bizarre twist, the opponent acts more like a friend. You'll wonder if you've been rooting for the right side! Invent terms of endearment to let loved ones know how special they are — new nicknames are bonding.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Circumstances are conducive to getting down on a love one. But all you

have to do is look at someone else's relationship to get that feeling of "Wow, do I ever have it good." Of course, love by comparison is never a great idea.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22).

The issue is reciprocity. You know you're not supposed to give in expectation of what you'll receive, but on the other hand, isn't that just plain good business? If a relationship is unbalanced, it's now glaringly obvious.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23).

The stakes are raised, and it's appropriate to be frightened. But courage doesn't have to wear a stoic face. In fact, on days like today, courage is a girlish giggle or a sardonic smirk. Overcoming (suffering — to lighten up).

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21).

In the movies, the biggest stars get the most close ups. The same is true in your line of work. If you're going to be a superstar performer, expect some scrutiny, especially this afternoon.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21).

Choose your company with the utmost self-esteem. When you mix with a thoughtful crowd, there's the opportunity for philosophizing and solving the world's problems — at least theoretically.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19).

Relationships are essential, to put it mildly. It's better than being bored! You could run up your cell-phone charges or cut into your sleep time in the process of sorting this one through.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18).

Your youthful appeal depends on maintaining young innocence — and sometimes immaturity. Face it. There's something in creating trouble! A reasonable Virgo or Taurus can keep you from getting in over your head.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20).

You'd rather not go too deep into the psychology that drives your actions or the actions of those around you. Why ask why when you can simply get over it? Because of this mind-set, you'll be made a leader.

Creators Syndicate

Holiday Mathis



Calvin and Hobbes



Jump Start



Zits



Cathy



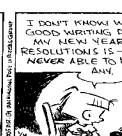
Hi and Lois



Beetle Bailey



Red and Rover



Better or Worse



Peanuts



Screen babies' hearing at birth

Dear Abby: A professional nanny in Ohio agonized over whether to tell the mother of twins the care that one of them might be hearing-impaired. You advised her to notify the mother immediately, and that the children's pediatrician should be told during their next scheduled visit.

I am a pediatrician with a special interest in deafness and a trustee at the Clarke School for the Deaf in Massachusetts. Although I agree with your advice that the nanny should speak to the infant's mother, please let your readers know that there is some urgency involved. Infants should be screened at birth. If deaf infants receive hearing aids and appropriate therapy before 6 months of age, they have a good chance at normal speech and language development.

After 1 year of age, the chances for normal development begin to diminish. If any caregiver suspects hearing loss in an infant,

that child's hearing should be tested as soon as possible.

— **Concerned Pediatrician,**
Northampton, Mass.
Dear Concerned: Thank you for your informative letter.
Read on:

Dear Abby:



The mother of two hearing-impaired children. I have struggled to get our government representatives to understand the value of early detection and push to make it a law for all newborns to be tested. However, until one is faced with the disability, I'm sure nothing will be done.

Hearing impairment can be detected while the child is still in the womb, and Crib-o-Grams can detect the impairment before the child leaves the hospital. Time is essential to ensure good speech and a normal life.

That nanny should urge the mother to notify the children's

pediatrician immediately.

— **Been There, Done That in Michigan**
Dear B.T.D.T.: I'm sure that many parents will be interested to know about prenatal testing.

Dear Abby: My son was fitted with his first set of hearing aids at 4 months. He is now 20 and has none of the speech patterns associated with hearing impairment. He had a home-based tutor until he was almost 3 and then was enrolled in a federally funded preschool language program with the local school district. It was a godsend.

Please do that nanny, the parents and the child a huge favor and tell the mother to contact the doctor right away for a brain-stem hearing test.

— **Mon Who Has Been There**
Dear Mom: I have learned more from my readers than I could in a classroom.

Letters for this column — with your address and phone number — should be addressed to Dear Abby, P.O. Box 69404, Los Angeles, CA 90069. Readers can write to Abby on the Internet at <http://www.ueppress.com/dearabby>. Universal Press Syndicate

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

LAIDY

LEHEW

LIPOCE

IMUSSE

ANS: HE

Yesterday's

Jumbles: TASTY VITAL TWINGE ORCHID

Answer: What it takes to make a fast meal — LOTS OF 'THAWED'

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

by Henri Arnold and Mike Argilron

This isn't a word game. You're not solving a puzzle. It's a cheat.



WHY THE MOGUL DIDN'T PAY THE SCULPTOR FOR THE BUST.

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

Spouse's porn problem private

Dear Annie: During our 12 years of marriage, my husband, "Bart," kept getting into credit-card debt, and I bailed him out three times.

His explanations were never good, and Bart was secretive about his whereabouts and his mail. We tried concealing several months ago, but he lied to the therapist. When I called him on it, he quit going. We now live separate lives in separate parts of our home. The only time we are together is for public appearances and family gatherings.

Lately, I have begun to find pornography everywhere in our home. Twice I caught Bart at home in the middle of the day, watching X-rated videos. I am sure now that this is what he has been up to all along.

I filed for divorce two months ago, and Bart's grown children are shocked and want to know what happened. I keep telling them they need to talk to their

father, but Bart tells them he has "no idea." Bart is a good person with a huge problem.

What can I tell his children and friends? — **Caring in Kansas**
Dear Caring: You don't need to tell them anything — the details are not their business, especially since Bart is unwilling to admit he has a problem. Simply say you are not comfortable discussing it. There is a support group for family and friends of sex addicts which you might find useful. S-Anon International Family Groups (sanon.org), P.O. Box 111242, Nashville, TN 37222-1242. For more information on sexual addiction, try the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists (aasect.org), P.O. Box 5488, Richmond, VA 23220-0488.

Dear Annie: I am a 24-year-old male, and my brother is 26.

Recently, my family received invitations to my cousin's Bat Mitzvah party. My brother was invited along with his girlfriend, whom he has been dating on and off for a year.

I am not currently in a relationship. Is it appropriate that my brother can bring a guest and I cannot? I fear I will have no one to dance with except my mother.

— **Solo at the Simcha**
Dear Solo: Since your brother is in a long-term relationship, it is appropriate to invite his girlfriend. Most families cannot afford to allow their single guests to bring friends along. Although it usually is rude to ask if you can bring a date, since you are a close relative, and you are not likely to meet eligible single women at the affair, we think it's OK in this instance. If your aunt and uncle say "no," your Mom is a good dancer.

Annie's Mailbox is written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, longtime editors of the Ann Landers column. Please e-mail your questions to anniesmailbox@comcast.net, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, c/o Creators Syndicate, 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045. Creators Syndicate

Family Circus



"If these good dishes were made in England, why are they called 'China'?"



Demis the Menace

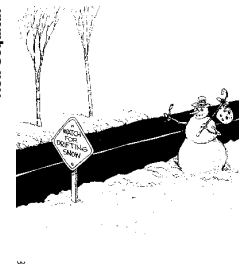


© Gary Larson

The Far Side



Non Sequitur



Shocker!

Bucknell saunters into Pittsburgh and upsets 10th-ranked Panthers

The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Bucknell opened a lot of eyes earlier in the week with a road victory against Saint Joseph's. The Bison left a lot of people with open mouths with their next act.

How about a 69-66 victory at No. 10 Pittsburgh on Sunday night?

The Bison were facing the highest-ranked opponent in their history and beat the Panthers for the first time since Jan. 11, 1975, when Bucknell's coach was a young man named Jim Valvano.

"I don't know where to put it," Bison coach Pat Flannery said when asked to rank the victory in school history. "You don't play these games on your schedule without thinking you can come in and beat them. I felt like we could come in and play with them. I'll put it in perspective when I calm down."

"Our guys were well aware of how good they were coming in," Pitt coach Jaime Dixon said. "It was one of those nights as far as how we played. But our defense is not where it needs to be."

Kevin Bettencourt made two free throws with 23 seconds remaining to give the Bison the lead for good.

Chris McNaughton scored 17 points, Charles Lee had 14, including the last two free throws with 2.3 seconds left, and Bettencourt added 13 for Bucknell (9-4), which has won six straight.

"It's a lot of fun to play a game like that," McNaughton said. "To end up winning, it's just tremendous for us. The way we played as a team made the difference."

Krauser had 20 points for Pitt (10-1), which saw the end of a

48-game home winning streak against non-conference teams.

"We were ready for the game, but when we got here, it was a different story," Krauser said. They came out blazing and we didn't step up to the challenge as well as we should have. Everyone hates to lose a game like this. It's an eye-opener."

Chris Taft had 19 points for Pitt, which trailed by nine points at halftime. Freshman Ronald Ramon sparked a second-half comeback for Pitt, hitting consecutive three-pointers to complete a 14-1 run and give the Panthers a 51-50 lead.

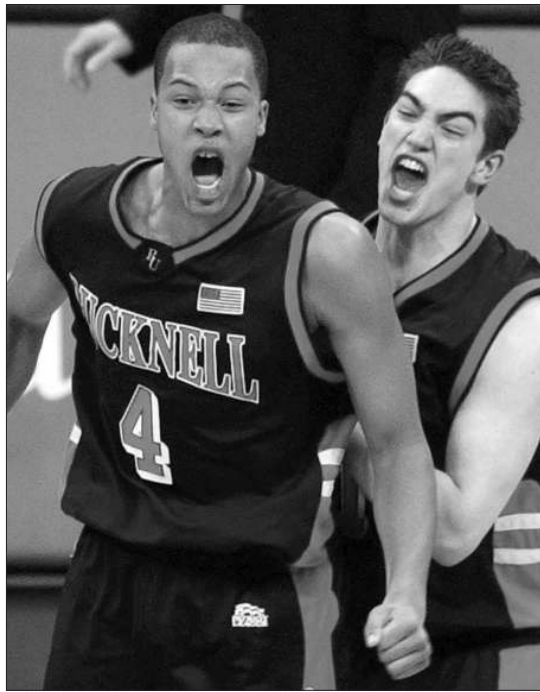
Bucknell rebuilt a four-point lead with 3:50 left, but Antonio Graves and Krauser hit three-pointers to give Pitt a 64-62 lead with 2 minutes left.

Bettencourt converted a three-point play with 1:37 left to put Bucknell ahead 65-64. Krauser answered with a basket on Pitt's next possession, and could have made it a three-point lead as he cruised in for a layup with 58 seconds left.

The shot, however, was blocked from behind by Abe Badmus and Graves was then called for a foul away from the ball with 23 seconds remaining. Bettencourt's free throws gave Bucknell a 67-66 lead.

On Pitt's next possession, Krauser slipped while trying to drive the lane and was called for traveling. Pitt got the ball back with 13 seconds left when Bucknell turned it over on the inbounds pass.

Graves missed a 15-footer with 5 seconds left and Lee, fouled on the rebound, made two free throws. Krauser's desperation shot at the buzzer bounced off the glass.



Donald Brown (4) and Darren Mastropolo celebrate Bucknell's 69-66 upset of No. 10 Pittsburgh on Sunday, the Panthers' first loss in 11 games. Bucknell, a member of the Patriot League, improved to 9-4.

Memories of Jerry as W. Virginia smacks N.C. State

The Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — After consecutive victories over ranked opponents, West Virginia finally seems like just a football school these days.

Johannes Herber and Mike Ganey each scored 15 points Sunday to lift West Virginia past No. 17 North Carolina State 82-69, giving the Mountaineers their best record since the famed Jerry West played in Morgantown.

Patrick Bellein and Tyrone Sully each scored 11 points in a balanced effort by the Mountaineers, who improved to 10-0 for the first time since the 1960 season, when West guided the Mountaineers into the NCAA championship game.

Six players scored in double figures and West Virginia shot 59 percent.

Coady John Bellein said he'd rather his team remain under the national radar, but he might not have a choice. The Mountaineers defeated No. 20 George Washington 71-65 last week and followed that by beating a team that had won 48 of 52 nonconference

Men's Top 25 Roundup

games at home. That could add up to a Virginia first appearance in the top 25 since March 1998, the last year the Mountaineers reached the NCAA tournament.

"A ranking would be nice," Ganey said. "But at the same time, it doesn't really matter, I guess."

Freshman Andrew Brackman scored 19 points in his first appearance for the Wolfpack (10-3), who played without leading scorer Julius Hodge. Last year's Atlantic Coast Conference player of the year was sidelined after spraining his right ankle in last week's 63-45 drubbing at St. John's.

The Mountaineers led 43-36 at halftime, then hit 10 of their first 15 shots after the break to build a 14-point lead with about 7½ minutes left.

"Right now our team just seems real dull," real boring, and that's not our style," said Cameron Bennerman, who missed seven of

nine shots and scored only five points. "We don't have dull and boring players on this team. Definitely our intensity just wasn't there."

No. 4 North Carolina 105, William & Mary 66: At Chapel Hill, N.C., Sean May scored 24 points on 9-for-13 shooting for the Tar Heels (12-1), who have won 12 in a row since losing to Santa Clara in the season opener. North Carolina scored more than 100 points for the second straight game, the first time that's happened in 10 years.

Corey Coffield and Nate Loe-hrke each had 16 points for the Tribe (4-6).

No. 5 Wake Forest 89, No. 25 Virginia 70: At Charlottesville, Va., Chris Paul had 21 points and nine assists and Justin Gray had six points in a 13-0 run early in the second half for the Demon Deacons (12-1), who won their seventh straight in the Atlantic Coast Conference opener. The outcome snapped a string of eight straight victories in the series by the home team.

Freshman Adrian Joseph, start-

ing in place of injured leading scorer Devin Smith, had 19 points for the Cavaliers (8-2), who have lost 10 straight conference openers.

No. 6 Duke 62, Clemson 54: At Durham, N.C., J.J. Redick had 20 of his 24 points in the second half and role player Lee Melchioni made two clutch three-pointers as the Blue Devils (9-0) rallied in their ACC opener. Shelden Williams had 13 points and 16 rebounds for Duke, which won its 18th straight over the Tigers. Sharrod Ford led Clemson (9-4) with 20 points.

No. 13 Washington 76, Stanford 73: At Seattle, Mike Jensen and Tre Simmons each had 17 points in the eighth straight victory for the Huskies (12-1, 2-0). Jensen, who was 6-for-9 from the field, made two free throws with 12 seconds to play to provide the final margin.

Chris Hernandez and Dan Grunfeld each had 15 points for Stanford (6-6). The two-time defending Pac-10 Conference champion dropped to 0-2 in league play for the first time since 1991.

No. 14 Arizona 87, Arizona St. 79: At Tucson, Channing Frye had a season-high 21 points and Mustafa Shakur added 20, including a season-high four three-pointers, for the Wildcats (11-2), who won their eighth straight.

Ike Diogu had 23 points, 11 rebounds and five blocks for the Sun Devils (11-2), who had a nine-game winning streak snapped in the Pac-10 opener.

No. 15 Texas 89, UNLV 82: At Austin, Texas, P.J. Tucker had 25 points and 10 rebounds to lead the Longhorns (10-2), who took control with a late 12-1 run.

Rommel Beck and Jerel Blassingame each had 17 points for the Runnin' Rebels (6-5). They combined for nine points — all on three-pointers — in a 10-0 run that gave the Runnin' Rebels a 50-48 lead with 13:30 to play.

No. 19 Louisville 98, Tennessee St. 64: At Louisville, Francisco Garcia matched his career-high with 23 points, including eight straight during a 27-4 run, to lead the Cardinals (11-2).

Bruce Price had 24 points for the Tigers (5-9).

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
New York	14	13	50.0
Philadelphia	13	14	48.1
Boston	13	14	48.1
New Jersey	10	18	37.9
Toronto	10	21	32.3

Southeast Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	25	7	78.1
Orlando	18	13	58.3
Charlotte	15	16	48.4
Atlanta	15	24	38.2

Central Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	17	12	58.6
Minnesota	16	13	55.0
Indiana	15	13	53.8
Chicago	15	16	48.4
Milwaukee	9	18	33.3

Western Conference

Southwest Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
San Antonio	25	7	78.1
Dallas	20	16	55.6
Houston	15	21	41.7
Memphis	12	16	42.9
New Orleans	2	28	7.1

Northwest Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
Seattle	22	7	75.8
Minnesota	16	12	57.1
Portland	14	15	48.3
Denver	14	16	46.7
Utah	11	20	35.5

Pacific Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
Phoenix	16	4	86.7
Sacramento	19	9	67.9
Golden State	18	10	64.3
LA Clippers	14	15	48.3
LA Lakers	9	27	25.0

Sunday's games			
Washington 104, Atlanta 83			
LA Clippers 89, Philadelphia 83			
Boston 89, Houston 88			
Phoenix 117, Portland 98			
LA Lakers 99, Dallas 113			
LA Lakers 99, Dallas 113			
LA Lakers 99, Dallas 113			

Monday's games			
Washington 104, Atlanta 83			
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Suns' Stoudemire nets 50

The Associated Press

Amare Stoudemire had 30 points after three quarters against Portland, and scoring 50 still was far from his mind.

It wasn't until he heard a voice from the crowd that the young Phoenix pioneer realized he had the chance to reach that milestone.

"I heard one of the fans say, 'That's when I thought about it,' he said. 'But I wasn't pressing and trying to get 50 points. It just came to me in the flow of the game.'"

Stoudemire finished right at 50, leading Phoenix to a 117-98 victory over the Trail Blazers on Sunday night.

A chance Stoudemire looked like he was cheering wildly in the final minutes as Stoudemire approached the mark, and the fans got their wish with 43 seconds left in the game.

Stoudemire, who scored on a variety of shots, including a layup and a power move, was so dominant that he reminded teammate Quentin Richardson of one of the NBA's greatest players.

"I think Chamberlain looked like that," Stoudemire said.

Stoudemire shot 20-of-27 from the floor and 10-of-17 from the foul line. Richardson scored 20 points and had 14 rebounds.



St. Louis Rams wide receiver Torry Holt (81) become the first player in NFL history with five consecutive 1,300-yard receiving seasons.

Rams edge Jets in OT to earn berth

By R.B. FALLSTROM
The Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — So what if the St. Louis Rams finished the season without a winning record. They are going to the playoffs.

Marc Bulger threw for 450 yards and three touchdowns to help the 500 Rams make the postseason with a 32-29 overtime victory on Sunday. The Rams (8-8) won their last two games after dropping four of the previous five, and the victory coupled with a Vikings' loss to the Redskins made their finish count.

"Once you get into the playoffs, everything is fair game," running back Steven Jackson said. "That's the feeling we have. We're peaking at that right time."

Curtis Martin won the NFL rushing title for the Jets (10-6), who got into the postseason, too. New York qualified when the Bills lost to the Steelers before their game against St. Louis got to overtime.

"I think for those of us who didn't know we made the playoffs regardless, we came in here kind of bitter," running back Curtis Martin said. "When we found that we were in, it kind of made us feel better."

Jeff Wilkins' 31-yard field goal with 3:03 to go in overtime ended the longest game in the NFL this year. The Jets forced overtime when Doug Brien kicked a 27-yard field goal with 3 seconds left in regulation.

Then, they played to win in the extra period.

Coach Herman Edwards left Martin and quarterback Chad Pennington in the game. He also allowed Brien to attempt a 53-yard field goal that went wide right, giving the Rams possession at their 43 to start their winning drive.

"We got a pass, and then again we didn't get a pass because we

won 10 games," Edwards said. "I hate to lose getting in, but we'll take it."

The Rams made the playoffs for the fourth time in five seasons under coach Mike Martz and will play the NFC West champion Seahawks (9-7) for the third time on Saturday in Seattle. St. Louis won two regular-season meetings, rallying from a 17-point fourth-quarter deficit in the last six minutes in Seattle in October for their most impressive victory of the season.

The Jets, who made the playoffs for the third time in four years with Edwards, will play at AFC West champion San Diego on Saturday.

They won at San Diego in the second game of the season. Shaun Ellis had three sacks and tipped a pass that Jonathan Vilma returned 38 yards for a touchdown for the Jets, who enter the postseason on a 5-6 slide after beginning the year 5-0.

"The feeling would have been a lot better had we won," Ellis said. "Obviously, our mood is kind of like in the middle, so we just have to put this game behind us and get ready for next week."

Martin had 153 yards on 28 carries and finished with 1,697 yards, beating Shaun Alexander of the Seahawks by 1 yard for his first rushing title. He also moved into fourth place on the NFL career rushing list, passing Eric Dickerson and Jerome Bettis.

Bulger needed only five plays, the last a 22-yard swing pass to Jackson, to get the Rams in position for Wilkins' game-winner.

A revived offense that scored more than 20 points for the first time in seven weeks helped the Rams advance. St. Louis appeared to have taken control early in the third quarter when Jackson broke a pair of tackles on a 20-yard run that made it 21-10.

Seahawks clinch NFC West, get another shot at St. Louis

By TIM KORTE
The Associated Press

SEATTLE — The Seattle Seahawks have one more shot to knock off the St. Louis Rams — this time it'll come in the wild-card playoffs.

"We felt like we let one, for sure, get away from us," Seattle cornerback Ken Lucas said of the earlier meetings this season. "Then we went to their place and they took care of business. We can get another chance to redeem ourselves. We feel we do that next week."

The Seahawks (9-7) will be home for Saturday's opening round of the playoffs because they edged the Rams (8-8) by one game for the NFC West title.

Matt Hasselbeck threw two touchdown passes and got another TD on a sneak, leading Seattle to a 28-26 win over the Atlanta Falcons on Sunday, a victory that locked up the division title and assured a home game for the rematch with the Rams.

"We know what kind of team they are," Seahawks cornerback Marcus Trufant said. "They are a big-play type of team. They can take the ball all over the place and they are a good team."

Had the Seahawks lost to Atlanta (11-5), they would have traveled to St. Louis next weekend.

Seattle's defense has been vulnerable to huge collapses this season, perhaps none more dramatic than an Oct. 10 meltdown. St.

Lois erased a 27-10 deficit in the fourth quarter in Seattle and won 33-21 in overtime.

Then came a 43-39 loss to Dallas, where the Seahawks blew a 39-29 lead.

They could have done it again against the Falcons, but they didn't. Warrick Dunn was smothered by collection of Seattle defenders on a 2-point conver-

sion attempt that would have forced overtime but instead ended the game.

"I knew I wasn't in," Dunn said.

Atlanta reserve quarterback Matt Schaub threw a 3-yard TD pass to Brian Finneran as time expired. The game's final drive covered 69 yards and consumed 4:28, and it seemed for a moment that maybe the Seahawks might have again.

Not this time, though.

"It's a testament to where we have come from," rookie safety Michael Boulware said. "Earlier in the season, we've lost those and now we're starting to win them. Hopefully, we can carry that into the playoffs and build on it."

Seattle's Shaun Alexander ran for 80 yards, finishing 1 yard behind Curtis Martin of the New York Jets (1,697) for the NFL's rushing title.

"I didn't know. It would have been sweet to get it. I feel worse because we had a quarterback sneak for a touchdown. That hurts, but I'll be all right," Alexander joked, speaking through a big smile.

It was a meaningless game for Atlanta, which lost its final two after securing the NFC's No. 2 seed in the playoffs two weeks ago.

The Falcons get a first-round bye next weekend.

Schaub almost helped the Falcons win anyway. On third-and-goal from the 3, Schaub found Finneran on a crossing route at the back of the end zone.

"I knew there wasn't another second to be squeezed out of that clock," Seahawks coach Mike Holmgren said.

That set up the 2-point conversion try. Schaub rolled left and handed off for a counter play to Dunn, who almost got across the goal line before he was squelched by linebacker Chad Brown and a pile of Seahawks.

"It was huge. It won the game for us," Brown said.

Steelers' subs sink Bills' bid to make postseason

By JOHN WAWROW
The Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Bills' cornerback Terrence McGee had trouble figuring out who Willie Parker was even after the game ended.

"I still don't know who that is," McGee said. "Who is this Willie Parker?"

You know, Willie Parker, the fourth-string running back who had 102 yards rushing and helped a collection of Steelers backups knock Buffalo out of the playoffs.

Resting most of their starters, including Ben Roethlisberger and Jerome Bettis, the play-off-bound Steelers showed they can win with backups, beating the Bills 29-24 on Sunday.

The Steelers won their 14th straight game, a single-season record set by Miami in 1972, and became just the fourth team in NFL history — and first in the AFC — to finish 15-1.

They won with Parker, an undrafted free agent, who became the only third player to have 100 yards rushing against what had been a stingy Buffalo defense this season.

They won with third-string quarterback Brian St. Pierre running the offense with the game on the line.

And they won with backup linebacker James Harrison, another

undrafted free agent, returning a fumble 18 yards for what proved to be the decisive score.

"If there was a team that you could put up as a poster boy for a 53-man roster, it's us," St. Pierre said.

"It was a whole of a game," coach Bill Cowher said. "We were playing to win this football game. These are the same guys we may need in the playoffs."

The Steelers had already clinched home-field advantage before the game. They now have a two-week wait to determine who they'll play.

The Bills have a long offseason to ponder what went wrong.

So much for the resilience Buffalo (9-7) showed in winning six straight and nine of 11 to overcome an 0-4 start. So much for making the playoffs for the first time since 1999.

The Bills' loss clinched a berth for the New York Jets despite their overtime loss to St. Louis.

"Pretty angry ... I'm a little bit in shock," said a red-eyed Drew Bledsoe. "The bottom line is if we can't beat them with their backups on the field, then we probably don't deserve to be in."

"It's frustrating because I want more for this organization, especially the fans," receiver Eric Moulds said. "I feel like they deserve more than what we showed today."



Buffalo Bills quarterback Drew Bledsoe fumbles as he is sacked by Pittsburgh Steelers' Ricardo Colclough (21) on Sunday.

The Bills looked nothing like a team that outscored its opponents 228-89 in its previous six games.

Buffalo managed just 267 yards, with seven three-and-outs. And the defense couldn't get the Steelers off the field, losing the time-of-possession battle by more than 11 minutes.

The game turned late in the third quarter after Rian Lindell missed wide right on a 28-yard field goal that left the Bills clinging to a 17-16 lead.

The Steelers responded with 10 points in an 85-second span at the start of the fourth quarter.

The decisive play came when Bledsoe was blindsided by rookie cornerback Ricardo Colclough, who forced a fumble that fell directly into Harrison's hands.

Broncos beat Colts 'B' team for wild card

BY EDDIE PELLIS

The Associated Press

DENVER — The Indianapolis Colts put their 'B' team on the field and left Peyton Manning and Edgerlin James on the sideline.

The Denver Broncos took advantage with a 33-14 victory Sunday and earned a dubious reward: A trip to Indy for the play-offs to face the Colts at full strength.

"If we were going to have Peyton and our whole group out there, then we wanted to use everything we had," Colts coach Tony Dungy said. "We weren't going to do that if we were going to have to play these guys again."

Jake Plummer threw for 246 yards and two touchdowns as Denver (10-6) earned the AFC's final wild-card spot, and a rematch next Sunday in which Manning will almost certainly throw more than the two passes he attempted in this game.

The teams also met last year in the first round, and the Colts (12-4) embarrassed the Broncos 41-10.

"I called that 'The Scene of the Crime,' because they stole our season from us there, and they did it in a big way," Broncos receiver Rod Smith said.

The Colts came into this game locked into the third seed in the AFC playoffs and knowing a rematch with Denver was very possible.

They had nothing to play for, and acted accordingly.

Manning played just one series, finishing the regular season with the same NFL-record 49 touchdowns he entered the week with.

"It's not something you want to get used to," Manning said. "I'd rather be out there playing."

He wasn't alone.

James also played just the first series, running one for minus-2 yards. The Colts started three rookies in their defensive backfield and Plummer took advantage, writing a nice closing chapter to a difficult regular season in which he took every snap.

His 246 yards gave him 4,089 for the season, surpassing John Elway (1993) for the single-season franchise record. His two touchdowns, including a 38-yard, over-the-shoulder catch by Ashley Lelie, gave Plummer 27 for the season, which tied Elway for the team record.

"I've never been about stats," Plummer said. "I'm really happy to be back in the playoffs."

Meanwhile, Plummer avoided any interceptions and finished the year with 20, many of which cost the Broncos dearly in a wildly inconsistent season.

By going 1-for-2, Manning finished the year with a 121.1 passer rating, easily breaking Steve Young's record.

"I never thought that record would be broken," said Broncos coach Mike Shanahan, who was with the 49ers the year Young set the mark.

With the record secure and his afternoon over, Manning stood on the sideline with the headphones on and watched rookie Jim Sorgi lead the Colts.

Sorgi (16-for-25, 168 yards, two touchdowns) completed his first seven passes and led Indy on a 56-yard drive for an easy 7-0 lead.

Later, he hit Reggie Wayne on a timing route and Wayne spun away from two Broncos for a 71-yard score that cut Denver's 10-point lead to 17-14.

From there, though, Denver slowly pulled away and got ready for a playoff run under circumstances very similar to last year.

The Broncos qualified for the 2003 postseason with a 31-17 win over Indy in Week 15 — Manning played that game — but got humiliated two weeks later. Manning threw five touchdowns that day and Denver remained without a postseason victory since winning the 1998 Super Bowl.

Broncos safety John Lynch had Sunday's hardest hit, a helmet-to-helmet shot on Dallas Clark that resulted in a fumble and an apparent Denver touchdown.

On review, though, referee Pete Morelli ruled the pass incomplete. The touchdown was nullified, a flag for unnecessary roughness that had been thrown, then picked up,



Indianapolis Colts defenders Anthony Floyd, left, and Jason Davis, back, break up a pass intended for Denver Broncos wide receiver Jason Lelie (85) on Sunday.

was reinstated, and Lynch will likely pay a price in the form of a fine from the NFL.

Given the pending reward, he said he wasn't all that upset about it.

"You've got to hit a team like that," he said. "They're so skilled it's so hard to get to do something to slow them down."

Ravens shut out of postseason

BY DAVID GINSBURG

The Associated Press

BALTIMORE — The Baltimore Ravens walked off the field still hopeful of reaching the playoffs.

Three hours later, their season was over.

After defeating Miami 30-23 on Sunday, the Ravens' chances of reaching the postseason rested on Denver losing to an Indianapolis team with nothing to play for and Jacksonville tying or losing to Oakland.

Denver won to clinch the final AFC wild-card slot, but the Ravens couldn't fault anyone but themselves for the way their season ended.

"If there is anybody to blame for the situation, it's definitely us," linebacker Terrell Suggs said.

A season-opening loss to Cleveland at home, defeats against Kansas City and Cincinnati put the Ravens in a situation where they had to depend on others to reach the postseason. That same kind of inconsistent play was on display Sunday during a game that Baltimore should have won handily.

Playing against a downtrodden Miami team that was forced to start third-string quarterback Sage Rosenfels, Baltimore built a 27-7 lead, then allowed the Dolphins to close to 27-21 before holding on.

"If we could win 40-7, that would be great," quarterback



Baltimore Ravens' Ed Reed, center, rushes upfield with blockers Edgerlin Hartwell, left, Chris McAllister, foreground right, and Adalius Thomas during the third quarter on Sunday.

Kyle Boller said, "but that's the way it is."

To secure a playoff berth, Baltimore (9-7) needed to defeat Miami and have Buffalo, Denver and Jacksonville fall to win.

Buffalo lost to Pittsburgh while the Ravens played, and the other two games began soon after Baltimore left the field for what turned out to be the final time this season.

"Time for a little Chinese food and a little game-watching," Ravens coach Brian Billick said before hurrying home.

The late games probably ruined his meal, but at least Baltimore made it to the last week of the season before seeing their playoff hopes dashed. Miami (4-12), which long ago began looking toward 2005, completed its worst season since 1969.

The Dolphins, who finished 3-4 under interim coach Jim Bates, have already hired Nick Saban as their new head coach.

"We ended 3-4 and played some darn good football games," Bates said. "Myself, all I feel is jubilation over having the opportunity to lead these guys over the last eight weeks of this season. I'll never forget this experience."

Miami used a 95-yard kickoff return by Wes Welker — the Dolphins' first for a score since 1989 — and a 35-yard TD run by Sammy Morris to get to 27-21.

It was 30-21 when Travis Minor appeared to score a touchdown for Miami, but officials ruled he came up short and Anthony Weaver ended the drive with an interception.

Baltimore's Jamal Lewis scored a touchdown and ran for 167 yards, giving him 1,006 for the season, and Jarrett Johnson returned an interception for a score. Teammate Ed Reed got his ninth interception and returned it 41 yards to get an NFL record for INT return yardage in a season (338).

Jaguars' early season blunders prove costly

BY JANIE MCCAULEY

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Jacksonville Jaguars believe their season ended too soon, and a shutout loss in the second-to-last week would haunt them for the rest of the winter.

The Jaguars did their part to try to reach the postseason by beating the Oakland Raiders 13-6 on Sunday, but their fate was decided minutes before their game ended when the Indianapolis Colts lost in Denver.

It wouldn't have come to this had Jacksonville not been blanketed by Houston on Dec. 26.

"There's no doubt we would have been in the playoffs if we would have beaten Houston and won here," cornerback Rashean Mathis said, referring to the 21-0 loss to the Texans.

If they could take something positive from Sunday it was that the Jaguars recorded their first winning season in five years.

Still, this club hoped to continue its season because Jacksonville will host its first Super Bowl next month.

"That kind of put a downer on the day," coach Jack Del Rio said as he learned his team was eliminated while in the tunnel that leads to the locker room. "I didn't see anything on the board during the game."

Byron Leftwich threw for 149 yards a week after sustaining a mild concussion, barely outplaying Oakland counterpart Kerry Collins, and Greg Johnson scored on a 1-yard run for the game's only touchdown to break a three-quarter tie.

The Raiders had a chance to send the game into overtime in the final seconds, but Collins fumbled the snap on fourth-and-goal at the 2, picked it up and was tackled for a loss.

"It's disappointing," Raiders coach Norv Turner said. "We had so many chances to win the game and, at the end, to tie the football game and put it into overtime, but we just couldn't get it done."

By beating the Raiders in the teams' first meeting since 1997, the Jaguars (9-7) established a winning road record for the first time since the '99 season when they went 14-2, 7-1 away from home.

"Our season has been disappointing," Leftwich said.

The Raiders understand. They are just 9-23 in two seasons since reaching the Super Bowl.

"Guys have to make plays. Guys have to really commit themselves as to what it is they really want to do," Oakland running back Tyrone Wheatley said. "The last two years here, we've had some guys who think they can just line up on Sunday and play football. It doesn't work that way. You have to commit yourself and stop thinking that your job is a sacrifice."

Collins capped his up-and-down season with a statistically disastrous finale: three interceptions, one loss fumble, no touchdowns and a 17.3 passer rating.

Donovon Darius intercepted two passes by Collins, including one in the end zone with 4:07 left. "I made some stupid throws and some stupid decisions, things that hurt us," Collins said.

Vikings catch a break, get into playoffs despite loss

BY JOSEPH WHITE
The Associated Press

LANDOVER, Md. — Wide open deep over the middle, Nate Burleson dropped a sure touchdown pass in the fourth quarter. "I don't know what happened," the Minnesota receiver said. "I just dropped the ball."

Mike Tice knows. Despite his best psychological cajoling, the coach saw his Vikings play tense and tight in a season-ending game they needed to win to be sure of clinching a playoff berth. As it was, Minnesota lost 21-18 to the Washington Redskins on Sunday but still qualified for the postseason because New Orleans beat Carolina.

The Vikings (8-8) will play their first playoff game since 2000 in Green Bay next Sunday. The Packers beat Minnesota twice this season by the same score, 34-31.

"We'll spend a week trying to come up with ways to get them to just go out and have fun," Tice said, "and make plays and not make mistakes when there's something sitting right there for you."

He'll have plenty of coaching material as supporting evidence.

Besides Burleson's drop, there was a false start on Randy Moss that essentially stopped a drive at the 1-yard line, a holding penalty on right tackle Adam Goldberg that negated a long touchdown pass to Moss, and a game-ending 66-yard kickoff return by Antonio Brown that set up a touchdown to put the Redskins ahead early — and for good.

The Vikings finished 8-8, losing seven of their last 10 after a 5-1 start. Last year, they fell from 6-0 to 9-7 and were eliminated by a touchdown pass on the last play of the season in a loss to Arizona. Tice jokingly referred to himself as "Coach Collapse" last week on an effort to lighten the mood. Now he has to come up with a new play.

"Most people say we backed into the playoffs. Yeah, that's true," Tice said. "Fortunately, we start off the same with 0-0."

Unfortunately, we certainly don't come into this thing with any tremendous rhythm."

The Redskins (6-10) gave a spir-



Redskins safety Sean Taylor (36) knocks a ball away from Minnesota wide receiver Randy Moss (84) preventing a reception during the second quarter. Minnesota lost its finale and still claimed a playoff spot.

ing finishing performance to Joe Gibbs' otherwise disappointing comeback season. His record is his worst in 13 years as a coach, and his offense consistently ranked at the bottom of the NFL all season.

"There were a lot of first-year coaches out there, and they did a lot better job than I did," Gibbs said. "I think the most important thing to come out of this year is with a real good understanding of the players."

The Hall of Fame coach doesn't plan on skipping a beat to begin preparations for next season, starting with a weeklong evaluation of the entire roster.

"I'm anxious to get started," Gibbs said. "The offseason will be a big time for us. I think it will be one of the most important six months of my coaching career,

trying to help ourselves every way we can. I think the most important thing is that our guys went and finished strong."

Patrick Ramsey completed 17 of 26 passes for 216 yards with two touchdowns and one interception, and Laddell Betts ran 26 times for a career-high 118 yards — substituting for injured back Clinton Portis.

The Redskins went 6-0 when a back rushed for 100 yards, 0-10 otherwise.

Washington's undermanned defense rattled Minnesota quarterback Daunte Culpepper with four sacks, and several times forced him to throw the ball away. Culpepper completed 27 of 44 passes for 299 yards and two touchdowns. His last pass was a 38-yard desperation touchdown to Marcus Robinson with 2 seconds remaining.



Panthers Jake Delhomme (17) and Muhsin Muhammad (87) walk along the sideline after turning the ball over to the Saints late in the game.

Saints top Panthers but fail to get help

BY JENNA FRYER
The Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Written off as a playoff contender months ago, the Carolina Panthers clawed their way back into the NFC race.

That's why missing out on the postseason was so painful.

The Panthers needed a win over the New Orleans Saints in Sunday's finale to overcome their 1-7 start and earn a chance to defend their NFC championship. Instead, they played about as poorly as they did during the first half of the season and lost 21-18.

"It stings because even starting out 1-7, down the stretch we still had our destiny in our own hands and we couldn't close it out," defensive tackle Brenton Buckner said. "It was there for the taking. We had that chance and just didn't take advantage of it."

The Panthers (7-9) were trying to become the first team under the current NFL playoff format to start 1-7 and make the postseason.

The Saints (8-8) had a similar uphill battle. They started 1-4, were just 4-8 a month ago, and coach Jim Haslett was fighting to save his job.

Then New Orleans won three straight to head into the finale with its own chance to make the playoffs. With a win over the Panthers and some outside help, they were in.

Team owner Tom Benson crowded around a tiny television after the Saints' victory, watching St. Louis and the New York Jets overtime game.

As the Rams won to eliminate

New Orleans from playoff contention, Benson shuffled off in disappointment as a heavy silence fell over the locker room.

"We just came up a little short," Benson said as he trudged past his dejected players. "We've got a hell of a ballclub. Anyone who did what we did this year has a hell of a ballclub."

Benson would not comment on Haslett's job security, and Haslett only wanted to discuss his disappointment.

"It's a shame because we're probably the hottest team in the NFC right now and we don't get a chance to show off what we can do in the playoffs," Haslett said. "We dug a hole early and we couldn't get out of it."

The Saints, who had one of the worst defenses in the NFL most of the season, turned it up against Carolina to break back on Jake Delhomme.

Delhomme, who spent five seasons as a backup in New Orleans before joining the Panthers last season, had his worst day in Carolina. He was sacked six times, had two costly fumbles and completed just 24 of 50 passes. He did throw for 307 yards and a pair of touchdowns, but his failure to find a rhythm crippled Carolina.

"There's no explanation for it," he said. "I had some chances to hit some guys and just didn't. They did a great job of rushing the passer, probably the best pass rush we've faced all season."

Still, he had the Panthers in position to tie at the end of regulation after two long passes and a hook-and-ladder set up John Kasay's 60-yard field goal attempt.

Sunday's NFL stars:



Quarterbacks

■ Marc Bulger, Rams, went 29-for-39 for 450 yards and three touchdowns in a 22-29 overtime win over New York.

■ Joey Harrington, Lions, went 22-for-40 for 346 yards, two touchdowns and an interception in a 24-10 loss to the Titans.

Receivers

■ Torrey Holt, Rams, had seven catches for 116 yards and three touchdowns in a 22-29 overtime win over the Jets.

■ Muhsin Muhammad, Panthers, had six receptions for 95 yards and two touchdowns in a 21-18 loss to the Saints.

■ Chris Chambers, Dolphins, had four catches for 126 yards and a touchdown in a 30-23 loss to Baltimore.



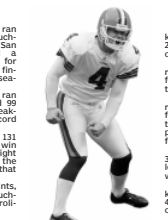
Running backs

■ Corey Dillon, Patriots, ran for 116 yards and one touchdown in a 21-7 win over San Francisco. Dillon earned a \$375,000 bonus by rushing for more than 1,000 yards. He finished with 1,635 in his first season with New England.

■ Rudi Johnson, Bengals, ran for three touchdowns and 99 yards to finish with 1,453, breaking Corey Dillon's team record of 1,435 set in 2000.

■ Lee Suggs, Browns, had 131 yards on 26 carries in a win over Houston, his third straight 100-yard rushing day. He was the first Browns player to do that since Greg Pruitt in 1976.

■ Deuce McAllister, Saints, ran for 140 yards and one touchdown in a 21-18 win over Carolina.



Special Teams

■ Phil Dawson, Browns, kicked five field goals (45, 23, 29, 45, 22) in a 22-14 win over Houston.

■ Jerriechi Cocherly, Jets, returned a kickoff 54 yards for a score in a 32-29 overtime loss to the Rams.

■ Wes Welker, Dolphins, returned a kickoff 65 yards for a score in a 30-27 loss to the Ravens. It was the Dolphins' first kickoff return for a score since 1989.

■ Jeff Wilkins, Rams, hit a 31-yard field goal with 3:03 left in a 20-17 overtime win over the Jets.

■ Neil Rackers, Cardinals, kicked four field goals (40, 45, 39 and 31) in a 12-7 win over Tampa Bay.

AP photos

Gretzky fears multiyear stoppage in NHL

The Associated Press

GRAND FORKS, N.D. — Wayne Gretzky fears the NHL could be shut down for as long as two years if a labor deal is not reached soon.

Gretzky, the NHL's career scoring leader and part owner of the Phoenix Coyotes, said an "even more alarming" scenario could leave the league if the lockout is not settled in the next few days.

"I'm scared we could be looking at a year, year and a half, two

Sports briefs

years, not just three months like a lot of people thought back in September," Gretzky said during a news conference Sunday at the site of the World Junior Championships, in which Canada will meet Russia in Tuesday's final.

The NHL board of governors is to meet Jan. 14 in New York. The league rejected a union proposal

and its own counteroffer was turned down during a session Dec. 14. No talks are scheduled.

"From the standpoint of owners, players and fans, everyone is disappointed there is no hockey," Gretzky said.

Since the players are not paid between April and October, Gretzky said there may be little chance of any breakthrough during the summer on a new collective bargaining agreement.

"We're going to be back where

we were last Sept. 15 come this Sept. 15," he said.

Miles hired as new LSU coach

BATON ROUGE, La. — LSU has picked Les Miles to replace Nick Saban as football coach.

Miles' hiring was announced Monday by school president William Jenkins.

The 51-year-old Miles, who led Oklahoma State to three straight bowl games, emerged as the top candidate Saturday, after Louis-

ville coach Bobby Petrino withdrew from consideration.

The LSU job opened when Saban took the head coaching job with the Miami Dolphins on Dec. 25. The school hoped to complete the search quickly to allow the new coach to immediately get involved with recruiting. The process was delayed because the most prominent candidates were in bowl games or in the NFL.

Arkansas football coach Houston Nutt withdrew from consideration on Thursday.

LSU hoped to interview Jacksonville Jaguars head coach Jack Del Rio, but the parties involved were apparently unable to set up a meeting.

Miles is 28-21 in four seasons with the Cowboys, who made just one bowl appearance in the 12 seasons before he arrived. His biggest wins came against the Cowboys' instate rival, Oklahoma, in his first two seasons.

On Wednesday, Oklahoma State lost 33-7 to Ohio State in the Alamo Bowl.

Saban had the nation's richest college football contract, a seven-year, \$18.45 million deal he signed after winning a share of the national title in 2003. The school is completing a stadium expansion and a new football operations center.

Angels add L.A. to name

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Baseball's Angels have a new name, and it's a mouthful: The Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim.

The switch will "strengthen the Angels' long-term economic health by enhancing the marketability through this metropolitan area and beyond," the team said Monday.

But the American League club's latest in a series of name changes could provoke a fight with the Anaheim City Council.

Anaheim officials claim the change breaks the terms of the team's 33-year lease with the city.

When the franchise began in 1961, owned by singing cowboy Gene Autry, it was the Los Angeles Angels. The team became the California Angels when it moved to Anaheim in 1966. In 1997, when the team was controlled by The Walt Disney Co., the franchise was renamed the Anaheim Angels.

Australia tops Slovakia

PERTH, Australia — Mark Philippoussis and Alicia Molik outlasted Daniela Hantuchova and Dominik Hrbaty 11-9 in a third-set tiebreaker to give Australia a 2-1 victory over Slovakia in the Hopman Cup team tennis tournament on Monday.

Two-time major finalist Philippoussis and Olympic bronze medalist Molik dropped the opening set of the mixed doubles match 7-6 (11-9), then won the second 6-3. Earlier, in singles, Molik beat Hantuchova 6-3, 6-3 and Hrbaty defeated Philippoussis 7-5, 6-2.

Elsewhere, Germany upset Russia 2-1, with Tommy Haas and Anna-Lena Groenfeldt winning a tiebreaker 10-6 to decide the mixed doubles against French Open champion Anastasia Myskina and 2000 U.S. Open champ Marat Safin.

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SPORTS



Stoudemire 'looked like Wilt' in scoring 50 against Portland, Page 25

Lose . . . and they're in?

Vikings, Jets reach playoffs despite defeats; others win but aren't so lucky

BY DAVE GOLDBERG
The Associated Press

The Jets, Vikings and Rams made it into the NFL playoffs Sunday.

The way they played, they might be out in a week.

New York and Minnesota backed in, the Vikings losing seven of their last 10 for the second straight season. The Jets lost 32-29 in overtime at the Rams, and the Vikings lost 21-18 at the Redskins.

But the Jets, who went 5-6 after starting 5-0, got in as an AFC wild card. And Minnesota and St. Louis both qualified in the NFC at 8-8, the second time that's happened; Dallas and Detroit were .500 playoff teams in 1999.

It all meant that the NFC's hottest team got left out of the postseason.

That was New Orleans, which won its last four games, three on the road, including a 21-18 victory at the Carolina Panthers on Sunday to finish 8-8. Carolina, which lost to New England in the last Super Bowl, won five straight games after starting 1-7, but finished 7-9 and missed the playoffs after losing two of its last three games.

"It's a shame ... we don't get a chance to show off what we can do in the playoffs," said New Orleans coach Jim Haslett, who may have saved his job with the late run.

Buffalo, which had won six straight, blew a chance to make the playoffs by losing 29-24 at home to Pittsburgh, even though the Steelers rested many starters. With the Jets losing, the Bills (9-7) would have made the playoffs with a victory.

The Vikings will play Sunday afternoon at Green Bay (10-6), to whom they have lost twice by the same score — 34-31 at Lambeau Field on Nov. 14 and at the Metrodome on Dec. 24.

The Rams will be at Seattle on Saturday to open the wild-card round.

The Seahawks (9-7) clinched the NFC West by holding off Atlanta 28-26 Sunday. But the Rams won both meetings this season, coming back from 17 points down with six minutes left in regulation to win in Seattle 33-27 in overtime. Then they won in St. Louis 23-12.

The Jets will play at the AFC West champion San Diego Chargers (12-4) on Saturday as the fifth-seeded team. The Chargers beat Kansas City 24-17 on Sunday with backups.

New York beat the Chargers 34-28 in the second week of the season, but that was be-



AP photos

Clockwise from above: Seahawks linebacker Isaiah Kacyvenski (58) celebrates as Falcons running back Warrick Dunn (28) is stopped inches short of the goal line on the two-point attempt that would have tied the game. The victory gave Seattle the NFC West title; Vikings receiver Randy Moss, right, and quarterback Daunte Culpepper sit during their loss in Washington. Minnesota still reached the playoffs when Carolina lost to New Orleans; the same was true for the New York Jets, whose kicker, Doug Brien, reacts to a missed field goal during overtime of their loss to the Rams. New York made the postseason when the Bills lost to the Steelers; Buffalo's Jonas Jennings reacts to that season-ending loss.



fore San Diego came together to win 10 of the last 12 games that meant anything. AFC South champion Indianapolis (12-4) will be at home Sunday in a rematch against Denver (10-6), which got in by beating the Colts 33-14 as Indy rested Peyton Manning, Edgerrin James and most of its record-setting offense.

The top seedings in each conference were set before Sunday.

In the AFC, North champ Pittsburgh

(15-1) and East champ New England (14-2) will host second-round games the weekend of Jan. 15 and 16. Both won Sunday despite using backups; the Patriots beat San Francisco 21-7.

In the NFC, East winner Philadelphia (13-3) earned the top seeding, and South winner Atlanta is No. 2. The Eagles clinched home-field advantage throughout the conference playoffs two weeks ago, then lost their final two games with backups.

The teams with byes traditionally advance. But this has been a wacky season, especially in the NFC.

Minnesota, for example, ended up 8-8 after starting 5-1. Last year, the Vikings finished 9-7 on a last-second play in Arizona and missed the playoffs.

So, maybe making it with a loss will change things.

"This team's going to drive me crazy," said Mike Tice, in the playoffs for the first time in his third full season as head coach.

"You spend the whole week trying to make sure they understand that you don't want to get yourself too worked up or too uptight, and you don't want to go out and play like you can't make a mistake. When you play like that, you go out and make mistakes."

No. 10 Pittsburgh upset; Wake, Duke cruise in ACC openers Page 24